

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark green color, framing the central text.

GUZ 16

Nehemiah

*Bible Commentary:
David Guzik TEV - XVI*

David Guzik

David Guziks' Commentary On
16 Nehemiah
Biblical Text – TEV (Good News Bible)

Report from Jerusalem

Neh 1:1 This is the account of what Nehemiah son of Hacaliah accomplished. In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year that Artaxerxes was emperor of Persia, I, Nehemiah, was in Susa, the capital city.

Neh 1:2 Hanani, one of my brothers, arrived from Judah with another group, and I asked them about Jerusalem and about the other Jews who had returned from exile in Babylonia.

Neh 1:3 They told me that those who had survived and were back in the homeland were in great difficulty and that the foreigners who lived nearby looked down on them. They also told me that the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down and that the gates had not been restored since the time they were burned.

Nehemiah's Prayer

Neh 1:4 When I heard all this, I sat down and wept. For several days I mourned and did not eat. I prayed to God,

Neh 1:5 " LORD God of Heaven! You are great, and we stand in fear of you. You faithfully keep your covenant with those who love you and do what you command.

Neh 1:6 Look at me, LORD, and hear my prayer, as I pray day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess that we, the people of Israel, have sinned. My ancestors and I have sinned.

Neh 1:7 We have acted wickedly against you and have not done what you commanded. We have not kept the laws which you gave us through Moses, your servant.

Neh 1:8 Remember now what you told Moses: 'If you people of Israel are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the other nations.

Neh 1:9 But then if you turn back to me and do what I have commanded you, I will bring you back to the place where I have chosen to be worshiped, even though you are scattered to the ends of the earth.'

Neh 1:10 "Lord, these are your servants, your own people. You rescued them by your great power and strength.

Neh 1:11 Listen now to my prayer and to the prayers of all your other servants who want to honor you. Give me success today and make the emperor merciful to me." In those days I was the emperor's wine steward.

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Nehemiah 1 – Nehemiah's Prayer

A. Nehemiah hears of Jerusalem's crisis condition.

1. Some 1,000 years after the time of Moses and some 400 years before the birth of Jesus, the nation of Israel and the Jewish people were in a desperate state.

a. Their nations were destroyed, First the northern Jewish kingdom of Israel and then the southern Jewish kingdom of Judah. The city of Jerusalem was completely conquered by the Babylonians and the once-glorious temple of Solomon was destroyed.

b. When the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, they deported almost everyone from the city and the region – for some 70 years, Jerusalem was something of a ghost town, with the potential to end up like many ancient cities – completely forgotten except to history.

c. When the Jews were deported to Babylon, they began to make homes for themselves there. They settled down, and many still followed the God of their Fathers, but they

did it from Babylon, with no desire to return to the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

i. Some of these faithful Jews were raised up to places of prominence in the governments they were deported to. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego became leaders in Babylon; Esther was made queen in the courts of a Persian king.

d. But after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, they were given the opportunity to return to their homeland, the Promised Land. Out of some two or three million Jews deported from the land, only 50,000 decided to return to the Promised Land. That's only something like 2%! But they did return, and in the days of Ezra, they rebuilt the temple and laid a spiritual foundation for Israel once again.

e. The Book of Nehemiah begins 15 years after the Book of Ezra ends; almost 100 years after the first captives came back to the Promised Land; and some 150 years after the city of Jerusalem was destroyed. After this long time, the walls of the city of Jerusalem were still in rubble.

i. Before this, citizens of Jerusalem had tried to rebuild the walls but had failed. In Ezr 4:6-23, we see that some 75 years before they tried to rebuild the walls but were stopped by their enemies. No one thought this obstacle could be overcome, so the walls lay in ruin and the people stayed in trouble.

2. (1-3) Nehemiah hears of Jerusalem's condition.

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, *in* the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had

survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.*”

a. **In Shushan the citadel:** Nehemiah lived in **Shushan**, the capital city of the Persians, and he lived in the **citadel** – that is, the fortified palace of the Persians. Right away, we know Nehemiah is someone important, living in the palace of the king of Persia.

b. **I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem:** Nehemiah’s body was in Persia, but his heart and his interest were in Jerusalem – 800 miles away. He wanted to know from those returning how the people and the city were doing.

i. We might think that an important man like Nehemiah had more important things to think about than a distant city he had never been to, and a people he had mostly never met. Yet, because his heart was for the things of God, his heart was not on himself, but on others.

ii. Nehemiah had the heart of Psa 137:5-6 : *If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth; if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.* If Jerusalem was special to God, then it would also be special to Nehemiah.

c. **The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire:** The news he received was not encouraging. The people were called **survivors**; this was not a hopeful title. They were in **great distress and reproach**, and the walls of the city itself were

broken down and the city **gates are burned with fire.**

i. The bad state of the people and the bad state of the city walls were intimately connected. In the ancient world, a city without walls was a city completely open and vulnerable to its enemies. They had no defense, no protection at all.

ii. An *unwalled city* was always a backwater town, with nothing valuable in it. If there were anything of value in an unwalled city, it could be stolen away easily because there was no defense to stop it.

iii. Those living in an unwalled city lived in constant stress and tension; they never knew when they might be attacked and brutalized. Every man lived in constant fear for his wife and children. The temple could be rebuilt, but never made beautiful, because anything valuable would be taken easily.

iv. No wonder the people lived in constant **distress**, in constant disgrace (**reproach**), living only as **survivors**. God has more for us than to be mere survivors. God not only wants us to be conquerors, but *more than conquerors through Him who loved us* (Rom 8:37).

3. (4) *Nehemiah's reaction to the news about Jerusalem and its people.*

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

a. **I sat down and wept:** Nehemiah's immediate reaction was extreme. He didn't just feel bad for Jerusalem and its people; right away, there was no strength in his legs (**I sat down**), and he began to weep and to mourn.

b. **Mourned for many days:** God was going to use Nehemiah to *do* something *about* this situation. But first, God *did* something *in* Nehemiah. Any great work of God begins with God doing a great work in somebody.

i. God prepared this long ago, with Nehemiah's important position in Persia, with a heart curious about the welfare of Jerusalem and its people. Now we see that he had a heart that broke over their needy state.

ii. God saw the need in heaven, but little would be done until the right man also felt the need. God would do something great to meet that need through Nehemiah.

iii. But there is no way Nehemiah could do this alone. He had to be a *leader* – one who *influences* other people – to get this job done. Nehemiah is a book all about *leadership* – something we obviously need today. Since leadership is *influence*, leadership applies to everyone. Everyone has an area of leadership. In some way, each one is a leader; the question is if they are a good leader or a bad leader.

iv. Leaders must prepare themselves for difficult work because it won't be easy. "There is no winning without warfare; there is no opportunity without opposition; there is no victory without vigilance. For when ever the people of God say, 'Let us arise and build,' Satan says, 'Let me arise and oppose.'" (Redpath)

v. Leaders must have a big vision, and Nehemiah had one. "Through me, God is going to correct a problem that's been around a hundred and fifty years. Through me, God is going to do something that completely failed down before." We must have a vision, a goal, that is big enough.

c. **I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven:** Nehemiah's reaction went beyond an immediate emotion. Many times, a concern will come over us in a flush, and then quickly pass. But if it is from the Lord it will abide and grow, and the burden will remain until the problem that prompted the burden is solved.

i. We should note as well what Nehemiah did *not* do: he did not complain, whine, or "see who could fix this problem." He immediately did what he knew he could do – pray, and intensely seek God in this situation.

d. **The God of heaven:** Nehemiah also had a clear understanding of Whom he fasted and prayed to. There are many "gods" people trust in but only the **God of heaven** can really meet our needs.

B. Nehemiah's prayer.

1. (5-7) *Nehemiah prays to God in humility.*

And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses."

a. **I pray:** Prayer is essential to leadership. If your vision is so big that only God can accomplish it, then you obviously must pray. If prayer isn't absolutely necessary to accomplish your vision, your goal isn't big enough.

i. It appears that Nehemiah prayed for four months before he did anything. Later, when the work of rebuilding the walls actually begins, it only takes 52 days to finish the job. But that 52-day project had a four-month foundation of prayer.

ii. Nehemiah took his pain and stress to God in prayer – and seemingly, was able to leave it there. Prayer will relieve your stress. You may be trying to relieve stress through entertainment, but all that does is divert your attention. Entertainment doesn't give any solutions to stress. Prayer will give you strength; when you wait on the Lord in prayer, He will renew your strength (Isa 40:31).

b. **I pray, LORD God of heaven:** Humility begins by simply understanding there is a God enthroned in the heavens, and *I am not Him!* Nehemiah recognizes exactly who God is: **LORD God of heaven... great and awesome God... who keep Your covenant... and mercy... with those You love.**

c. **Please let Your ear be attentive:** Humility also understands my complete dependence on God. When Nehemiah desperately asked God to **hear the prayer of Your servant (let Your ear be attentive... Your eyes open)**, it reflected his complete dependence on the LORD. Only God could help, and if God would only **hear**, Nehemiah knew He would help.

i. God will allow you to be fruitless to expose your need for total dependence.

d. **Confess the sins... which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned:** Humility will also confess sin openly. Nehemiah plainly and simply confessed sin, without any attempt at excusing the sin.

i. We must always avoid *excusing* ourselves in the confession of our sin. May we never say, "Lord, *if* I sinned" or "Lord, I'm sorry, but You know how hard it was" or other such nonsense. We can find great freedom in open, honest confession, without any attempt at excuse or wondering "if" I sinned or not.

e. **Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You:** Humility identifies with the needy. Obviously, Nehemiah was a godly man; but he openly and passionately put himself with his **father's house**, and prayed by using "**we**" instead of "they."

i. "You never lighten the load unless first you have felt the pressure in your own soul. You are never used of God to bring blessing until God has opened your eyes and made you see things as they are." (Redpath).

2. (8-10) *Nehemiah comes to God looking to God's promises.*

"Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.' Now these *are* Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand."

a. **Remember:** This is a powerful way to come to God, asking Him to remember His promises. Nehemiah said, "LORD, You made a promise to Moses and this nation, I ask you now to make good on it." Nehemiah quoted from both Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 30.

i. This, no doubt, is the secret to great power in prayer: to *plead the promises of God*. We may be a bit annoyed when one of our children comes to us saying “Daddy, you promised”; but our Father in heaven *delights* in it – and often *demand*s it before prayer becomes effective.

ii. In Psa 81:10 God says to His people, *Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it*. God will not open His storehouse until we open our mouths in asking Him to perform His promises.

b. If you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them: Nehemiah quoted a *conditional* promise. The condition was returning to God and keeping His commandments. He really couldn’t know if the nation was keeping the commandments, but he knew that *he* was keeping them, and because he had identified himself with the nation in their sin the nation could also identify itself with Nehemiah in his godly fulfillment of these conditions.

3. (11) *Nehemiah prays with a heart ready to do something.*

“O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” For I was the king’s cupbearer.

a. Grant him mercy in the sight of this man: Nehemiah concluded by asking God to bless him when he would soon speak to the king of Persia about the matter. Nehemiah was going to *do* something about the sorry state of Jerusalem’s walls and people, and he knows without God’s intervention, he can do nothing.

b. Let Your servant prosper this day: This is a prayer of a man of *action*, not a sideline critic. Nehemiah does not pray "God, make it all better" or "God, get someone *else* moving on this problem." Instead, his prayer is "God, *use me* to make it better."

i. "Recognition of need must be followed by earnest, persistent waiting upon God until the overwhelming sense of world need becomes a specific burden in my soul for one particular piece of work which God would have me do." (Redpath)

ii. "Laying the matter to heart, he did not begin to speak with other people about what they would do, nor did he draw up a wonderful scheme about what might be done if so many thousand people joined in the enterprise; but it occurred to him that he would do something himself." (Spurgeon)

Nehemiah Sent to Judah

Neh 2:1 One day four months later, when Emperor Artaxerxes was dining, I took the wine to him. He had never seen me look sad before,

Neh 2:2 so he asked, "Why are you looking so sad? You aren't sick, so it must be that you're unhappy." I was startled

Neh 2:3 and answered, "May Your Majesty live forever! How can I keep from looking sad when the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

Neh 2:4 The emperor asked, "What is it that you want?" I prayed to the God of Heaven,

Neh 2:5 and then I said to the emperor, "If Your Majesty is pleased with me and is willing to grant my request, let me go to the land of Judah, to the city where my ancestors are buried, so that I can rebuild the city."

Neh 2:6 The emperor, with the empress sitting at his side, approved my request. He asked me how long I would be gone and when I would return, and I told him.

Neh 2:7 Then I asked him to grant me the favor of giving me letters to the governors of West-of-Euphrates Province, instructing them to let me travel to Judah.

Neh 2:8 I asked also for a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal forests, instructing him to supply me with timber for the gates of the fort that guards the Temple, for the city walls, and for the house I was to live in. The emperor gave me all I asked for, because God was with me.

Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem's Walls

Neh 2:9 The emperor sent some army officers and a troop of cavalry with me, and I made the journey to West-of-Euphrates. There I gave the emperor's letters to the governors.

Neh 2:10 But Sanballat, from the town of Beth Horon, and Tobiah, an official in the province of Ammon, heard that someone had come to work for the good of the people of Israel, and they were highly indignant.

Neh 2:11 I went on to Jerusalem, and for three days

Neh 2:12 I did not tell anyone what God had inspired me to do for Jerusalem. Then in the middle of the night I got up and went out, taking a few of my companions with me. The only animal we took was the donkey that I rode on.

Neh 2:13 It was still night as I left the city through the Valley Gate on the west and went south past Dragon's Fountain to the Rubbish Gate. As I went, I inspected the broken walls of the city and the gates that had been destroyed by fire.

Neh 2:14 Then on the east side of the city I went north to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool. The donkey I was riding could not find any path through the rubble,

Neh 2:15 so I went down into Kidron Valley and rode along, looking at the wall. Then I returned the way I had come and went back into the city through the Valley Gate.

Neh 2:16 None of the local officials knew where I had gone or what I had been doing. So far I had not said anything to any of the other Jews—the priests, the leaders, the officials, or anyone else who would be taking part in the work.

Neh 2:17 But now I said to them, "See what trouble we are in because Jerusalem is in ruins and its gates are destroyed! Let's rebuild the city walls and put an end to our disgrace."

Neh 2:18 And I told them how God had been with me and helped me, and what the emperor had said to me. They responded, "Let's start rebuilding!" And they got ready to start the work.

Neh 2:19 When Sanballat, Tobiah, and an Arab named Geshem heard what we were planning to do, they laughed at us and said, "What do you think you're doing? Are you going to rebel against the emperor?"

Neh 2:20 I answered, "The God of Heaven will give us success. We are his servants, and we are going to start building. But you have no right to any property in Jerusalem, and you have no share in its traditions."

Nehemiah 2:1-20

Nehemiah 2 – Nehemiah's Commission

A. Nehemiah the cupbearer.

1. (1-2) Nehemiah stands before the king.

And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, *when* wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, "Why *is* your

face sad, since you are not sick? This *is* nothing but sorrow of heart.” So I became dreadfully afraid,

a. I took the wine and gave it to the king: The last verse of Nehemiah 1 told us that Nehemiah was the *king’s cupbearer* – a significant position in any ancient royal court. The cupbearer was a personal *bodyguard* to the king, being the one who tasted wine and food before the king did – making certain no one could poison the king.

i. “The *cupbearer* was a high official in the royal household, whose basic duty of choosing and tasting the wine to demonstrate that it was not poisoned, and of presenting it to the king, gave him frequent access to the king’s presence and made him potentially a man of influence.” (Kidner)

ii. The king, therefore, had to have a tremendous amount of trust in his cupbearer, who had to be a man of faithful and impressive character. If the cupbearer could be turned against the king, assassination would be easy.

iii. The cupbearer also was a *servant* to the king; he was responsible for choosing most of the foods and wines the king and the court would enjoy.

iv. The cupbearer was also a trusted *advisor* to the king; since he was constantly in the king’s presence, and greatly trusted, and a man of character, it was natural the cupbearer would often be asked his opinion on different matters coming before the king.

b. In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes: As Nehemiah gave wine to the king, care was given to note the specific day the events in Nehemiah 2 began.

i. Why was it so important for God to tell the date these things happened? First, to show that Nehemiah prayed and waited for four months with the kind of heart described previously in Nehemiah 1. During those four months, Nehemiah's prayer was likely "LORD, either take this burden from my heart or show me how to be the man to answer this burden."

ii. The date is also important, because it establishes the date given to restore Jerusalem and its walls. Dan 9:25 says that exactly 173,880 days from this day – which was March 14, 445 B.C. – Messiah the prince would be presented to Israel. Sir Robert Anderson, the eminent British astronomer and mathematician, makes a strong case that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy exactly, to the day, entering Jerusalem on A.D. April 6, 32, precisely 173,880 days from Neh 2:1.

c. **I had never been sad in his presence before:** On that particular day, Nehemiah noted that he had never been sad or depressed in the presence of the king, and on this day when the king took notice, Nehemiah **became dreadfully afraid**. As was true in the courts of many ancient kings, it was forbidden to be sad in the presence of the king. The idea was that the king was such a wonderful person that merely being in his presence was supposed to make you forget all of your problems. When Nehemiah looked sad, it could have been taken as a terrible insult to the king.

i. When the king said, "**This is nothing but sorrow of heart,**" Nehemiah knew the king had noticed his sadness, and that the king took it seriously. Nehemiah must have wondered if the next words from the king would be, "Off with his head!"

ii. Nehemiah was also afraid because he knew that he was going to the king for something very important. There was a lot riding on what was going to happen in response to this question.

iii. Nehemiah understood it was not his place to change the king's heart. He prayed and left it up to the LORD, instead of dropping hints and trying to manipulate the situation. Then one day, four months later, the king's heart was different. Are we making the mistake of trying to change someone else's heart, instead of leaving it up to the LORD to do it?

2. (3) Nehemiah's response.

And said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"

a. **May the king live forever:** Nehemiah had probably said these words many times before. This was probably almost a motto among professional cupbearers; since they tasted the wine and food before the king did, they naturally wished the king a good long life.

b. **The city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire:** With this, Nehemiah explained why he was sad. Jerusalem was a destroyed, disgraced city.

i. No one had to tell the king this was a disgraceful state of affairs; he would immediately sympathize with Nehemiah's concern for the dignity, safety, and well-being of his people.

ii. We see also Nehemiah's great tact and wisdom, because he tells of his concern without specifically mentioning the name of the city. The king would naturally have a bad association with the name

“Jerusalem,” knowing from history it was a city rebellious against the Persians and resistant to their rule. Nehemiah gets the sympathy of the king on his side before he reveals the city!

c. **Why should my face not be sad:** Nehemiah’s answer was not only wise, it was *honest*. Often, when are we visibly depressed or troubled, and when someone asks us about it, we simply reply “Nothing’s wrong!” or “Oh, I’m O.K.” At those times, we aren’t *honest*.

i. Many people are troubled by this dilemma. No one wants to be a whiner, boring others with our problems when the other person may only be asking out of common courtesy. On the other hand, we know the tremendous value there can be in sharing our concerns with someone else who can pray with us and perhaps share some wisdom from the Bible.

ii. One way to live in this kind of honesty is to seek out others whom we know and trust and sharing with them our struggles and needs. But if we don’t know a person well enough to feel confident sharing our personal life, we can still ask them to pray for us in general. They don’t need to know all the details to pray, because God knows all the details. Also, when someone asks if we are troubled, we can be open to the idea that this person is a special gift to us at this time.

iii. However, we must avoid two traps. First, we must avoid “shopping” for advice – asking many people, telling all of them our problems until we find the advice we want. Second, we must be especially careful of talking to others in a way that puts the problem on other people – people who aren’t there to give their side of the story. Nehemiah didn’t say to the king, “I’m sad because those incompetents in

Jerusalem have had 100 years to build the walls and they haven't done anything. They are a bunch of hardened, uncaring, worthless people." He described the problem without putting anyone else to blame. When we fail to do this, there's a word for it: *gossip*.

iv. When we are the person whom others ask for prayer or whom others come to for help, it is helpful to guard against the temptation to know every detail of the problem. Of course, it is *interesting* to hear the details of the problems others have, but we do not need to know all the fine points. Our prayer is still valuable if we don't know all the details. We are not less able to lead them to Jesus for His loving care. Some things need to be talked out more than others, but sometimes we want the other person to talk it out more for *us* than for *them*.

3. (4-8) Nehemiah's request.

Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), "How long will your journey be? And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. Furthermore I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors *of the region* beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which *pertains* to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will

occupy.” And the king granted *them* to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.

a. **What do you request:** Right away, Nehemiah knew God gave him favor with the king. His response wasn’t “Off with his head!” but “What can I do to help?” Nehemiah knew that four months of prayer were answered.

b. **So I prayed to the God of heaven:** Knowing his prayer had been answered, Nehemiah prayed again. This was not a long, extended prayer (he could have said, “Well king, let me pray about it for a few days and then I’ll get back to you”). Instead, this was an immediate, silent, “Help me LORD!” prayer. Nehemiah knew this was an incredible opportunity, and he did not want to miss the chance.

i. It is wonderful to labor long in prayer; but prayer does not have to be long to be effective. This is especially true when the situation will not allow a long prayer.

c. **I ask that you send me to Judah:** Nehemiah again showed great wisdom as he respectfully asked for a leave of absence and to be *sent* (**you send me**) by the king. He asked the king to share his concern for Jerusalem and to become a partner in getting the city and its people back where they should be.

i. Nehemiah’s vision was also revealed: **that I may rebuild it.** That was a huge job and a big goal. Nehemiah isn’t going on a mere fact-finding expedition, or to tell the leaders of Jerusalem what a bad job they were doing. He goes to get the work done, trusting in God all the way!

ii. Again, Nehemiah shows wisdom by referring to Jerusalem without specifically mentioning the city

(send me to Judah, to the city of my father's tombs). Although, we can also say that Nehemiah is not being deceptive. Though Jerusalem might have historically been a rebellious city to Persia, it isn't any longer – and will not be.

d. **It pleased the king to send me:** Nehemiah's sympathetic heart, his months of prayer, his moment of prayer, his great faith, his big vision, and his wise responses were all answered positively. The king was enthusiastic about supporting Nehemiah in this venture.

e. **I set him a time:** As a capable leader, Nehemiah clearly had a *plan*. The four months in prayer were not only spent in talking to God, but also in *listening* to Him and in working out a Spirit-led plan for what to do when God did open the door.

i. Nehemiah knew how long he would need to be gone (**I set him a time**). He knew he would need letters of safe passage from the king (**let letters be given to me**). He knew what kind of materials would be needed (**timber**). He knew what work needed to be done (**the gates of the citadel... the city wall... the house I will occupy**). Nehemiah knew all of this without ever having seen for himself the condition of Jerusalem before! Nehemiah knew the needs by carefully and patiently seeking God.

ii. Nehemiah had a plan, and God always works through a plan. The LORD our God is a planning God: *The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations. (Psa 33:11)*. From the beginning of the plan of salvation in eternity past, God has a plan and is working it out.

iii. Sometimes it may seem that God blesses a lack of planning, and sometimes it seems God does a blessed work completely different from what we have

planned. But in every case, God works through planning – if not our planning, then His planning. But as a general principle, God wants to train us up into the work of being planners, just as He is a planner.

iv. *The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.* (Pro 21:5) Faith is no substitute for planning. We aren't more spiritual for failing to plan and for shooting from the hip. There may be sometimes when we simply can't plan, but we should never reject planning.

f. **He must give me timber:** Nehemiah was also a bold man, not afraid to ask others to help when he knew they had the resources to help. Once the king was willing to be a part of Nehemiah's goal (**it pleased the king to send me**), he went right on to ask for an official seal of approval on the project (**letters... for the governors**) and for the king to finance the project (**that he must give me timber**).

i. Nehemiah didn't ask because he wanted to take advantage of the king. Instead, he showed honor and respect to the king by inviting him to participate in a worthy work. He knew the king was *able* to provide these things; he sensed the king's heart was *willing*, and so he shows the king how he can do what his willing heart wants to do!

g. **And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me:** Though this was a pagan king, Nehemiah still understood that God could work through him in a mighty way. God can provide for our needs in totally unexpected or unlikely ways.

B. Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem.

1. (9-10) Arrival and opposition.

Then I went to the governors *in the region* beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard *of it*, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.

a. **Then I went:** This is another example of Nehemiah's godly leadership. He actually **went** – he traveled the 800 miles from Persia to Jerusalem to do the work of rebuilding the walls and the people.

i. Many people have a heart touched like Nehemiah's. They may also have the heart for prayer, the wisdom, the vision, the plan and the faith of a Nehemiah – but they stop short of actually going out and *doing* what needs to be done for the goal to become a reality.

ii. Sometimes we substitute *talking* about something for actually doing it. It is one thing to stand around with other believers and talk about doing some evangelism; praying about it, planning it, talking about it – it is another thing to actually go out and *do* it. God is in the *doing* of the thing.

iii. Our spiritual enemies don't mind as long as *all* we do is plan and pray and talk; but when God's people start *doing* something, they take notice.

b. **Beyond the River:** This means "beyond the Euphrates River," an important landmark that separated one region from another. Once a traveler crossed the river, they were on the road to the region of Judea and the city of Jerusalem. At this point Nehemiah spoke to the **governors** of this region who ruled under the Persians.

c. **Gave them the king's letters:** Nehemiah came prepared. He had letters showing he was truly sent by the king. He had **captains of the army and horsemen** with him. He also had substantial supplies of lumber from the king's forest. Truly, the king of Persia had responded to Nehemiah's invitation to become a partner in the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

d. **Sanballat the Horonite... Tobiah the Ammonite:** At the governor's station, Nehemiah met these two enemies of Jerusalem and anyone who cared for the welfare of the city. **They were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.**

i. These two cared nothing as long as Jerusalem was weak and vulnerable; even though the temple was there, and worship conducted, that was fine – as long as the people of God were not strong, secure, and free from stress.

ii. Notice when this opposition came: not at the heart stage, not at the vision stage, not at the prayer stage, not at the planning stage, but when progress came in *doing* something.

iii. Some people fear ever stepping out for the LORD, because they know opposition will come. They somehow think their life will be better or easier if they stay in their low, mediocre state before God. What deception! A better life from holding back for Jesus Christ? Tough times are going to come *anyway*; but when we are growing and stepping forth in the Lord, we are far more equipped to deal with them.

2. (11-16) *Nehemiah makes a secret tour of Jerusalem and her walls.*

So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire. Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but *there was* no room for the animal under me to pass. So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.

a. **So I came to Jerusalem:** After being in Jerusalem **three days**, Nehemiah still did not tell anyone why he is there and what God has put on his heart: **I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem.**

i. When Nehemiah entered Jerusalem with a military escort and lumber from the king of Persia's forest, people would notice him – but he didn't say anything about his mission until the time was right. Good leaders learn a sense of God's timing.

ii. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, full of heart, full of prayer, full of faith, full of wisdom, full of a big vision, full of support from the king, and finally gets to his destination – and he did nothing for three days.

iii. **I told no one:** "It is good to have Christian friends, but it is dangerous to wear your heart on your sleeve. Have a secret place somewhere which

nobody knows anything about but you and God.” (Redpath).

iv. “You will often find it best not to commit your plans to others. If you want to serve God, go and do it, and then let other people find it out afterwards. You have no need to tell what you are going to do, and, I may add, there is no need for you retelling what you have done, for very, very frequently God withdraws himself when we boast of what is being done.” (Spurgeon).

b. I went out by night through the Valley Gate: It seems that Nehemiah set out from the west side of the city, and turned left towards the south, continuing counter-clockwise around the rubble of the city walls, until coming back to his starting point.

c. And viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire: Nehemiah wasn’t just sightseeing. Instead, he carefully studied the broken-down walls and the burned gates. The word **viewed** in Neh 2:13; Neh 2:15 is a medical term for “probing a wound to see the extent of its damage.”

i. For the first time, Nehemiah saw with his eyes what had been reported to him, and what God had called him to repair. There is no way he could have made this tour with a dry eye, knowing the extent of the damage and the fear, poverty, and insecurity the broken walls meant in the lives of the people.

d. The walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire: Nehemiah knew the job of rebuilding the walls couldn’t go forth unless he saw exactly how bad the situation was.

i. Nehemiah could have focused on all that was right with Jerusalem. They were back in Judah and, the forced exile was over. The temple was built. Sacrifice and worship were conducted. Progress was being made, slow as it was. There was much to be thankful for in Jerusalem – but sometimes, one must look at what is wrong, and that is what Nehemiah did.

ii. We deceive ourselves if we only look to what is good. Some have no trouble with this; they *always* find it easy to see what is wrong. They are full of criticism. They believe they have the unique spiritual gift of pointing out what is wrong. But Nehemiah teaches us by example – we must look at the broken-down towers, and carefully study what is wrong – but only if we have the heart, the prayer, the vision, the passion to be used of God to set it right. There is little use in the Kingdom of God for those who offer advice without really knowing first-hand the condition of the problem.

iii. But with the right hearts – hearts ready to *act* – we have to take an honest look. “It is utter folly to refuse to believe that things are as bad as they really are. It is vital in any undertaking for God to know the worst, for whenever there is to be a wonderful movement of the Holy Spirit, it begins with someone like Nehemiah who was bold enough to look at facts, to diagnose them, and then to rise to the task.” (Redpath)

iv. When we look at other Christians around us, we see that many are strong, joyful, growing, in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Many have victory over sin and we are thankful for that. But you can also see the figurative walls in their life and see some broken down portions. Some among us are desperately

hurting or are trapped in a cycle of sin and want to get out, but don't know how to ask for help. Some feel like they are on the outside looking in. Some respect God but haven't yet given their lives to Jesus Christ. God can, and will, build up all the broken-down portions of these figurative walls.

v. When we take a look at our children, we know that we love them, and we care for them. But when we look at them honestly, we see their weaknesses of character and the areas where they fall short. We soberly consider what will become of them if those weaknesses dominate their entire personality. We consider what will happen if they grow up rejecting Jesus, and of their future ruin unless God uses us to train and nurture their character.

vi. In the same way, when we look at our business, our relationships, our friendships, we should take an honest look, and not only look at what is pretty.

vii. When we look at the church, we love the church and are thankful for what God does here. But when we look honestly, we are probably not satisfied with the impact we have made on this community. We cannot say that it is enough or that there should not be far more. We think of the financial support and the outreach and the spread of the Word of God through the church, and yet know that it could be more and that the ministry could go out further and broader.

viii. If someone took a tour of your life the same way Nehemiah took a tour of Jerusalem they might notice many broken down portions in the figurative walls of your life. Pro 25:28 says: *Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.* Many lives are like a city with broken walls – living with a constant sense of fear, poverty, and insecurity.

We should not hide our eyes from these broken-down places; God wants to change them and make the first steps of change right away.

e. The walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire: As much as anything, Nehemiah took time to count the cost before starting the work. He has a *heart*, he has *faith*, he has a *vision* – but before that vision can become a reality, he has to see exactly what has to be done, and what it will cost – in terms of time, effort, money, and leadership.

3. (17-18) Nehemiah meets with the leaders of Jerusalem.

Then I said to them, “You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem *lies* waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.” And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king’s words that he had spoken to me. So they said, “Let us rise up and build.” Then they set their hands to *this* good work.

a. You see the distress that we are in: The citizens and leaders of Jerusalem were not sitting around waiting for a superman to come along and rebuild their walls. In all probability, they had come to accept that it was an impossible job. It seemed that no one could fix a 100-year-old problem. Years ago, when someone tried, enemies simply stopped them. So, they lived with it.

b. Then I said to them: Now, when Nehemiah came and explained his vision for the rebuilding of the walls to the leaders of the city, there was a tremendous amount of importance attached to the meeting. Nehemiah could not do the job by himself, and he was in a lot of trouble if leaders didn’t support him.

i. No doubt this was something Nehemiah prayed about a lot. He might have prayed something like this, "O LORD, prepare the hearts of the leaders of Jerusalem to support this work You have called me to. Let them see I do not come condemning or criticizing them, only to help. Give me the right words to say and speak to them ahead of time about this work You have called me to."

c. **The distress that we are in:** Nehemiah *wisely* approached the leaders of Jerusalem. He had to. In the accomplishment of any vision or goal – or at least of a God-sized vision or goal, there will be certain people *essential* to accomplishing the goal – you *must* have their help. Nehemiah's wise approach gives us an example to follow.

- Wisely, Nehemiah asked them to notice the obvious: **You see the distress**; sometimes, the obvious is the hardest to see.
- Wisely, Nehemiah did not come as if he was there to fix *their* problem: **the distress that we are in**. Nehemiah owned the problem as his also, even though he might not have. Nehemiah didn't play the blame game. He didn't criticize the leaders of Jerusalem. He simply identified right along with them regarding the problem.
- Wisely, Nehemiah asked for their partnership: **Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem**. Nehemiah figured if God could move upon the heart of a pagan king to partner in this work, He certainly could move upon the hearts of His own people to join in! Nehemiah wasn't there to do it *for* them, but to partner *with* them in the job of restoring Jerusalem and its people.
- Wisely, Nehemiah pointed them to the result: **that we may no longer be a reproach**. This wasn't really about bricks and mortar; it was about removing a condition of

shame, fear, poverty, and insecurity among God's people. The hard work involving bricks and mortar would be worth it because it would have real spiritual impact in both individuals and the community. When David saw Goliath and was outraged that this monster was casting disgrace on the people of God, he simply said, "*Is there not a cause?*" (1Sa 17:29). Everyone else was self-focused and figuring the odds, and David said, "let's get the job done. I'm willing for God to use *me* to do it."

- Wisely, Nehemiah encouraged them in the LORD: **I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me.** Nehemiah assured the leaders this wasn't *his* project, it was *God's* project. If people sense your vision is really all about *you*, and raising *you* up, and making *you* great, they will rightly be hesitant. But if it is from God, and they can see it, they will be thrilled to partner with you.

- Wisely, Nehemiah gave them confidence by telling of what God had already done: **I told them... of the king's words that he had spoken to me.** Nehemiah could say, "Look, you can know this is of God; the heart of the king of Persia has been touched by the Lord to support this project!" If something has God's fingerprints on it, people will want to support it; if it has only man's fingerprints on it, they will rightly hesitate.

d. **And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me:** We also notice what Nehemiah *didn't* do; he didn't beg or make deals. Nehemiah had a high calling from God, and asked others to be part of that vision, but he never stopped treating it like a high calling. He wasn't going to be a carnival barker trying to manipulate people into knocking over milk bottles even when they really didn't want to do it.

i. Nehemiah didn't offer rewards, incentives, or vacations out at the Sea of Galilee for the ones who got the job done. Those are all external motivations and aren't God's highest calling. Nehemiah simply said, "Let's stop kidding around. We know there's a job to be done, and God is leading us to get it done now." He relied on the LORD and the leaders to create a true *inward* motivation. External motivation – manipulation, guilt, pressure, carnal rewards can work for a while, but are never a part of God's vision for getting things done.

e. **Let us rise up and build:** This response of the leaders of Jerusalem was of God. They said, "Yes, Nehemiah, we're with you!" This was all the more remarkable considering the ways they might have responded – ways we might respond when we are challenged to partner in a work.

- They might have denied the *need* for the walls. "You know, we have gotten along without those walls for a hundred years now! After all, we already have the temple!" But we want to do far more than simply "get along." God has more for us, and *now* is the time to enter in.

- They might have seen the project as *too much work*. "Well Nehemiah, it's a fine work, and we hope it goes well for you. Don't think we can help you now." But we are willing to pay the price for something that is truly of God.

- They might have seen the *opposition as too strong*. "Nehemiah, why even start? We tried before, and our enemies stopped us. It will just happen again." But we have more faith than that.

f. **Then they set their hands to do this good work:** This shows God's hand at work here. Nehemiah's *heart*, his *prayer*, his *boldness*, his *big vision*, his *action*, and his

wisdom, were all rewarded. This was a God-inspired thing; God moved the hearts of the leaders to do this.

- i. We know that Nehemiah was a great leader because people followed him. The people he was meant to lead were genuinely influenced by his leadership.

4. (19) *The opposition rises in response to the work of God.*

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"

- a. **But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it:** Things had been going extraordinarily well, so we are not surprised that opposition came up again. **Sanballat the Horonite** and

Tobiah the Ammonite official both came to oppose the work.

- i. Spiritual opposition to the work God wants to accomplish is a reality many Christians fail to take account of and are thus defeated in what God would have them to do.
- ii. The Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, took on humanity to experience spiritual warfare even as you do; He knows what it is to be under attack, how to break through to victory, and so He knows how to lead His people to victory.

- b. **Sanballat... Tobiah:** These two first surfaced in Neh 2:10; *they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.* They had previously made their opinion known; now

they will seek to *do* something about the progress Nehemiah is making.

i. **Tobiah** (a Jewish name) was a man of influence, being associated with the high priest's family, and getting help from the priests (Neh 13:4). "Tobiah" was a prominent name in priestly families for generations to come. The name "Tobiah" means "Yahweh is good" – a strange name for a man who was an opponent of the work of God.

ii. **Sanballat** was connected by marriage to priestly families (Neh 13:28). An ancient document from this period refers to Sanballat as "governor of Samaria." (Kidner)

iii. These men were Jews – were fellow brothers – of Nehemiah and the citizens of Jerusalem. We might have thought they would have supported his work, but they do not. Opposition is always difficult; but when it comes from brothers, it is then mixed with the pain of betrayal as well.

iv. The Bible makes it clear we have enemies and opponents also, but chiefly they are spiritual enemies: *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against... spiritual armies of wickedness in heavenly places* (Eph 6:12). However, we also realize that attacks from spiritual enemies can come through flesh-and-blood people (Mat 16:23). We can experience spiritual attack on a direct inward level from spiritual enemies, or through people who are, wittingly or unwittingly, being used as tools by our spiritual enemies.

c. **They laughed us to scorn:** Sanballat and Tobiah used **scorn** in their attack. They wanted Nehemiah to feel mocked, stupid, and foolish. **They laughed us to**

scorn shows that they showed their spite (**and despised us**) with a humorous edge.

i. This scorn may come to us in an inward feeling ("Who am I trying to kid? I must be some kind of fool!"). Or it may come through the words of those who, if they know it or not, are being used by our spiritual enemies.

ii. Many are turned away from God's will because they experience or fear scorn. Men who were not afraid of death have been manipulated because they did not want to be laughed at. It seems that sooner or later, God will allow every Christian to be tested at this point; as to whom they regard more, man or God. We must never be more concerned about what people may say about us than what God requires of us.

iii. The way that Sanballat and Tobiah used laughter and scorn as weapons against the work of God should also make us reflect on our own use of humor. Some Christians who are otherwise well-meaning are tools of the enemy, all for the sake of a few laughs.

d. **Will you rebel against the king:** This shows that Sanballat and Tobiah had a low view of God's authority. Their question showed that they figured the king of Persia was the highest authority in the land.

i. First, they were completely ignorant. They didn't know what they spoke about. The king *had* given permission, even if they didn't know it. The king was *partner* in the work. Many times, those who are being used by our spiritual enemies against us simply don't know what they are talking about.

ii. Second, they were not concerned with God's authority. Really, it did not matter if the King of Persia was against this work if the God of heaven and earth

was for it. One with God makes a majority. Nehemiah could have turned the question back on them: *Will you rebel against the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?*

5. (20) *Nehemiah's answer to his opponents.*

So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

a. **So I answered them:** Nehemiah ignored their scorn. His bold, straightforward words showed he had not been put on the defensive by their mocking, scornful attack.

i. When faced with the choice of pleasing man or pleasing God, Nehemiah knew exactly what he would do. Let them mock – he would serve the LORD.

b. **And said to them:** Nehemiah did not give a point-by-point reply. He did not show the document proving the king's support of the project. If he did, Sanballat and Tobiah would have just claimed it was a forgery or would have come up with another objection. Nehemiah knew that hearts that refuse to be convinced will *never* be convinced.

c. **The God of heaven Himself will prosper us:** Nehemiah instead proclaimed his confidence in God. "It doesn't matter if you are against us. God's work will succeed."

i. Nehemiah didn't put the work on hold while a crisis response team figured out the best way to answer Sanballat and Tobiah. He wasn't going to let them sidetrack him. He had a work to do and he was going to do it. If you allow your enemies to get you to stop what you should be doing and give all your attention to them, then your enemies have won.

ii. There is a touch of holy boldness in Nehemiah's response. "Go ahead and take your best shot. It won't work. God is with us. He isn't with you. You will fail. We will prosper under the hand of the God of heaven!"

d. **We His servants... will arise and build:** Nehemiah proclaimed *who he was* and *what he would do*.

i. Nehemiah and his followers were **servants** of God. Sanballat and Tobiah felt confident because they were servants of the king; but Nehemiah is a servant of God.

ii. Nehemiah and his followers had a job to do. Not for a moment did he say, "Gee, maybe this isn't God's will!" They had agreed to **rise up and build** (Neh 2:18), and they will do it.

iii. In facing our enemies, we must always keep focus on *who we are* and *what we should do*. Failure to see these will always lead to defeat. These are exactly the things our spiritual enemies want us to forget! And sometimes, you just have to proclaim it!

e. **You have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem:** Nehemiah proclaimed the truth about his enemies. They may have been Jews by birth; they may have been legal citizens of Jerusalem; they may have owned property in the city. But their hearts showed they had no **heritage or right or memorial** in God's city.

i. Nehemiah sized these two up more quickly than we often do. He knew they weren't for him or for Jerusalem, or for God at all – though they may have claimed to be. It was as if Nehemiah said, "You don't belong here. God's doing a great work here, and you don't want to be part of it. Just move on."

ii. We can say the same to our spiritual enemies: "You have no heritage or right or memorial in me. I belong to Jesus Christ. You don't belong here. You may as well move on because I'm not going anywhere."

iii. This opposition did not immediately melt away. We often wish that if we did everything right as Nehemiah did here, then the opposition would just go away. But it didn't. These two opposed the work all the way until it was finished. *But they didn't stop it.* God's work got done, and they were proved completely wrong.

Rebuilding the Wall

Neh 3:1 This is how the city wall was rebuilt. The High Priest Eliashib and his fellow priests rebuilt the Sheep Gate, dedicated it, and put the gates in place. They dedicated the wall as far as the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel.

Neh 3:2 The men of Jericho built the next section. Zaccur son of Imri built the next section.

Neh 3:3 The clan of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They put the beams and the gates in place, and put in the bolts and bars for locking the gate.

Neh 3:4 Meremoth, the son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz, built the next section. Meshullam, the son of Berechiah and grandson of Meshezabel, built the next section. Zadok son of Baana built the next section.

Neh 3:5 The men of Tekoa built the next section, but the leading men of the town refused to do the manual labor assigned them by the supervisors.

Neh 3:6 Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah rebuilt Jeshanah Gate. They put the beams and the gates in place, and put in the bolts and bars for locking the gate.

Neh 3:7 Melatiah from Gibeon, Jadon from Meronoth, and the men of Gibeon and Mizpah built the next section, as far as the residence of the governor of West-of-Euphrates.

Neh 3:8 Uzziel son of Harhaiah, a goldsmith, built the next section. Hananiah, a maker of perfumes, built the next section, as far as Broad Wall.

Neh 3:9 Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of half of the Jerusalem District, built the next section.

Neh 3:10 Jedaiah son of Harumaph built the next section, which was near his own house. Hattush son of Hashabneiah built the next section.

Neh 3:11 Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath Moab built both the next section and the Tower of the Ovens.

Neh 3:12 Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of the other half of the Jerusalem District, built the next section. (His daughters helped with the work.)

Neh 3:13 Hanun and the inhabitants of the city of Zanoah rebuilt the Valley Gate. They put the gates in place, put in the bolts and the bars for locking the gate, and repaired the wall for fifteen hundred feet, as far as the Rubbish Gate.

Neh 3:14 Malchijah son of Rechab, ruler of the Beth Haccherem District, rebuilt the Rubbish Gate. He put the gates in place, and put in the bolts and the bars for locking the gate.

Neh 3:15 Shallum son of Colhozeh, ruler of the Mizpah District, rebuilt the Fountain Gate. He covered the gateway, put the gates in place, and put in the bolts and the bars. At the Pool of Shelah he built the wall next to the royal garden, as far as the stairs leading down from David's City.

Neh 3:16 Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of half of the Bethzur District, built the next section, as far as David's tomb, the pool, and the barracks.

Neh 3:17 The following Levites rebuilt the next several sections of the wall: Rehum son of Bani built the next section; Hashabiah, ruler of half of the Keilah District, built the next section on behalf of his district;

Neh 3:18 Bavvai son of Henadad, ruler of the other half of the Keilah District, built the next section;

Neh 3:19 Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, built the next section in front of the armory, as far as the place where the wall turns;

Neh 3:20 Baruch son of Zabbai built the next section, as far as the entrance to the house of the High Priest Eliashib;

Neh 3:21 Meremoth, the son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz, built the next section, up to the far end of Eliashib's house.

Neh 3:22 The following priests rebuilt the next several sections of the wall: Priests from the area around Jerusalem built the next section;

Neh 3:23 Benjamin and Hasshub built the next section, which was in front of their houses; Azariah, the son of Maaseiah and grandson of Ananiah, built the next section, which was in front of his house;

Neh 3:24 Binnui son of Henadad built the next section, from Azariah's house to the corner of the wall;

Neh 3:25 (25-26) Palal son of Uzai built the next section, beginning at the corner of the wall and the tower of the upper palace near the court of the guard; Pedaiah son of Parosh built the next section, to a point on the east near the Water Gate and the tower guarding the Temple. (This was near that part of the city called Ophel, where the Temple workers lived.)

Neh 3:27 The men of Tekoa built the next section, their second one, from a point opposite the large tower guarding the Temple as far as the wall near Ophel.

Neh 3:28 A group of priests built the next section, going north from the Horse Gate, each one building in front of his own house.

Neh 3:29 Zadok son of Immer built the next section, which was in front of his house. Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, keeper of the East Gate, built the next section.

Neh 3:30 Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, built the next section, their second one. Meshullam son of Berechiah built the next section, which was in front of his house.

Neh 3:31 Malchijah, a goldsmith, built the next section, as far as the building used by the Temple workers and the merchants, which was by the Miphkad Gate to the Temple, near the room on top of the northeast corner of the wall.

Neh 3:32 The goldsmiths and the merchants built the last section, from the room at the corner as far as the Sheep Gate.

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Nehemiah 3 – The Building of the Walls

A. The record of the builders.

1. (1-2) Builders near the Sheep Gate.

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred, *and* consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananel. Next to *Eliashib* the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.

- a. **They built... built... built:** Nehemiah 3 is all about work – how individuals pitched in and did the work together, coordinated and led by Nehemiah.

b. **And built the Sheep Gate:** The work is described in reference to the gates of the wall. The gates were the critical entry and exit points to the city, and the places most likely to see an enemy attack. Therefore, the work started at each gate and worked out from there.

i. The **Sheep Gate** was so named because it was the gate where shepherds brought their flocks to sell them. Up until a few years ago, this same gate was being used for this same purpose in Jerusalem.

c. **Eliashib the high priest:** This was the first worker mentioned. He **rose up** to do the work with the other priests, and they worked at rebuilding the **Sheep Gate** and the section of wall near there.

i. **Eliashib the high priest** acted as a godly leader should; he was out in front of the work, leading by example. He did not act as if he was too “spiritual” for the hard work of rebuilding the walls.

ii. If you are a leader, others are looking hard at you and they follow your example. If you are slow to work, they will be also; if you are full of discouragement and doubt, they will follow. There is a good reason why **Eliashib** was first mentioned, and why the rest of the chapter is filled with the names of more than 50 others that followed his example in the work.

d. **They consecrated it:** The idea behind consecration is to recognize something as special, as uniquely set apart for God’s glory and service. These city gates were made special to God. Nehemiah and Eliashib knew that God wanted *everything* set apart special to Him, including these city walls and gates.

i. Because the first of the work was specially set apart to God, it was a way for them to say, “All of this work

belongs to You, LORD. This is a special work done unto You.”

ii. This is a great secret to joy and success in life: to do everything as unto the LORD. *And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.* (Col 3:17)

e. **Next to Eliashib the men of Jericho built:** Every man’s work was important, and though these did not work on a gate, they did the important job of building up the walls of protection and security for Jerusalem.

2. (3-5) Builders near the Fish Gate.

Also the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. And next to them Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, made repairs. Next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs. Next to them Zadok the son of Baana made repairs. Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.

a. **The Fish Gate:** This gate got its name because of the nearby fish market. The **sons of Hassenaah** did the work of rebuilding the gate while others helped.

b. **Made repairs:** The word for **repairs** is the Hebrew word *chazaq*, used 35 times in this chapter alone. It has the idea of strengthening, encouraging, of making something strong (Kidner). These are principles that have application to far more than *material* gates and walls.

i. The Bible says that we must be *built up* and *repaired*. In Eph 4:12, God says the purpose of the church is *for the equipping of the saints*, and idea

behind *equipping* is to prepare, strengthen, and make something able to be used. We come together as Christians to strengthen one another, to make us strong and able to live for Jesus and serve Him outside the gatherings of the church.

c. **Next to them the Tekoites made repairs:** The **Tekoites** did their work. The people of the city of Tekoa were more than willing to work – **but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.** For the most part, people joined in – but not *everybody*. These **nobles** from the city of Tekoa thought they were above the hard work, so they didn't join in.

i. Literally, the idea in the Hebrew is that they wouldn't submit – they would not "bend their necks" to what the LORD wanted them to do. The real issue was submission. Maybe they thought they had a better plan, maybe they didn't like how Nehemiah was doing it. Whatever their reason, you can be sure they later regretted it because they stand in infamy as the only people mentioned in this chapter who *did not* join in the work.

ii. Perhaps Nehemiah wanted to record the *names* of each of these nobles, but the LORD made him have mercy and only indicate them in a general way.

3. (6-12) *Builders near the Old Gate.*

Moreover Jehoiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors, with its bolts and bars. And next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, repaired the residence of the governor of the region beyond the River. Next to him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. Also next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs; and

they fortified Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. And next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, leader of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs in front of his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabniah made repairs. Malchijah the son of Harim and Hashub the son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section, as well as the Tower of the Ovens. And next to him was Shallum the son of Hallohesh, leader of half the district of Jerusalem; he and his daughters made repairs.

a. **Moreover Jehoiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate:** Among the repairers of the **Old Gate** and its nearby walls was **Uzziel, the son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths**. Along side him was **Hananiah, one of the perfumers**.

i. These were men of different professions, not professional builders. They were not trained for this kind of work. It would have seemed they had an easy excuse to not do anything, but they jumped in and did the work. **They fortified Jerusalem**, even though many would not think them qualified or able.

ii. The most important ability in the work of the LORD is *availability*. The one with few gifts and little talent, who has a passion and a drive to see God's work done, will accomplish far more than a gifted and talented person who doesn't have they passion and drive to do the LORD's work.

iii. "Viggo Olsen, who helped rebuild ten thousand houses in war-raved Bangladesh in 1972, derived unexpected inspiration from reading a chapter ordinarily considered one of the least interesting in the Bible: 'I was struck... that no expert builders were

listed in the “Holy Land brigade.” There were priests, priests’ helpers, goldsmiths, perfume makers, and women, but no expert builders or carpenters were named.” (Yamauchi)

b. **The Broad Wall:** Today you can see in Jerusalem the remains of this **Broad Wall** – and broad it is, more than 20 feet (6 meters) wide. Critics had denied the accuracy of Bible history like this, but the archaeologist’s shovel constantly confirms the truth of the Bible.

c. **Rephaiah the son of Hur, leader of half the district of Jerusalem:** He worked on this section of the wall. Here was another **leader** who knew real leadership is getting down and doing it – being a servant, instead of expecting others to do it for you.

d. **Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs in front of his house:** Five times in the Nehemiah 3, it speaks of those who worked on the section right in front of their **house**. Often, we need to give attention to the work of God right at our own homes. If the work needs to be done anywhere, it needs to be done at our homes.

i. The names of the men who are said to have **made repairs in front of his house** are interesting:

- Neh 3:10 mentions **Jedaiah**, and his name means *He who calls unto God*. Our homes must be places of prayer, where the family calls unto God.

- Neh 3:23 mentions *Benjamin*, and his name means *Son of my right hand*, speaking of a protector. Our homes must be places of protection and peace.

- Neh 3:29 mentions *Zadok*, and his name means *Justice*. Our homes must be places of justice and integrity, especially with integrity regarding our marital vows and promises.

- Neh 3:30 mentions *Meshullam*, and his name means *Devoted*. Our homes must be places of devotion and separation to God.

e. **Malchijah son of Harim**: This man is mentioned in Ezr 10:31 as one of the men who was confronted by Ezra for the sin of taking on a pagan wife. That was many years before this, so **Malchijah** got things right with God and now, years later, he served Him.

- i. A believer should never let a past failure get in the way of serving God. Repent, set it right, make a stand for righteousness – and get on serving the LORD.

f. **Shallum the son of Hallohesh... he and his daughters made repairs**: *Everyone* who could help did help in the repairs.

- i. With the great number of different people working on the walls, it was imperative that they all work with the same mind – or the wall would not be uniform and would not be a strong defense. Yet, each section was a little different because different people worked on each section.

- ii. In the same way, in the family of God, the work must be done with a common vision and mindset – *the mind of Christ*, as Paul described it in 1Co 2:16. When believers work together in one accord, yet with each offering their distinctive gifts, the work of God gets done in a glorious way.

4. (13) *Builders near the Valley Gate.*

Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They built it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and *repaired* a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Refuse Gate.

5. (14) *Builders near the Refuse Gate.*

Malchijah the son of Rechab, leader of the district of Beth Haccerem, repaired the Refuse Gate; he built it and hung its doors with its bolts and bars.

6. (15-25) Builders near the Fountain Gate.

Shallun the son of Col-Hozeh, leader of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he built it, covered it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and repaired the wall of the Pool of Shelah by the King's Garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David. After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, leader of half the district of Beth Zur, made repairs as far as *the place* in front of the tombs of David, to the man-made pool, and as far as the House of the Mighty. After him the Levites, *under* Rehum the son of Bani, made repairs. Next to him Hashabiah, leader of half the district of Keilah, made repairs for his district. After him their brethren, *under* Bavai the son of Henadad, leader of the *other* half of the district of Keilah, made repairs. And next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, the leader of Mizpah, repaired another section in front of the Ascent to the Armory at the buttress. After him Baruch the son of Zabbai carefully repaired the other section, from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. After him Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, repaired another section, from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. And after him the priests, the men of the plain, made repairs. After him Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs by his house. After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress, even as far as the corner. Palal the son of Uzai *made repairs* opposite the buttress, and on the tower which

projects from the king's upper house that was by the court of the prison. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh made repairs.

a. **By the King's Garden:** Charles Spurgeon preached a beautiful sermon on this text, where he spoke of six different gardens of the King: Eden, Gethsemane, the Garden Tomb, the human heart, the church as a whole, and the garden of Paradise in heaven.

7. (26-27) Builders near the Water Gate.

Moreover the Nethinim who dwelt in Ophel made repairs as far as the place in front of the Water Gate toward the east, and on the projecting tower. After them the Tekoites repaired another section, next to the great projecting tower, and as far as the wall of Ophel.

a. **The Tekoites repaired another section:** The section of wall near the Water Gate saw some remarkable service. Apparently, the **Tekoites** weren't satisfied with the significant work they did before – they went on to do even more work. They weren't going to let the bad example of their nobles who did no work (Neh 3:5) keep them from working above and beyond the call of duty.

8. (28-30) Builders near the Horse Gate.

Beyond the Horse Gate the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house. After them Zadok the son of Immer made repairs in front of his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, made repairs. After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah made repairs in front of his dwelling.

a. **Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah was the keeper of the East Gate:** Apparently the gate in front of his house was in good condition, so he pitched in and helped at the **Horse Gate**. His unselfishness was a great example.

b. **Meshullam the son of Berechiah made repairs in front of his dwelling:** The Hebrew word for **dwelling** is actually *chamber* – it refers to a singular room. **Meshullam** had only one small room, yet he was devoted to God and to the work of rebuilding the walls. It is better to be devoted to God in one small room than to have a mansion and have a heart cold to God.

9. (31-32) Builders near the Miphkad (muster or assembly) Gate.

After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the Nethinim and of the merchants, in front of the Miphkad Gate, and as far as the upper room at the corner. And between the upper room at the corner, as far as the Sheep Gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.

B. Observations on Nehemiah 3.

1. This chapter shows the need for believers to work together to accomplish something.

a. It pleased God to see His people working together in one accord, with one heart, with one mind. God will put us into situations where we *must* work together, and learn how to lead, how to follow, how to work together with one heart and mind.

b. The wall was continuous. Any gap compromised the entire structure. Therefore, each space at the wall was important – even if someone did not think so. As well, the wall could never be strong if someone was tearing it down at a different section.

2. The work done was a reflection on the family – almost everyone mentioned is mentioned as the son of someone.

a. It is in the family that our children learn how to work, and parents must be committed to teaching their children how to be hard workers. In a spiritual sense, our hard work – or lack of it – is a reflection on our spiritual family. Each Christian should be a good reflection of their spiritual family.

3. Evidence of Nehemiah's leadership.

a. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he made each man accountable for his work. Each man had a section of wall he was responsible for, and it was known he was responsible for it. No one wanted it to be seen that they were a poor worker in God's cause.

i. By giving each man a sense of responsibility for the work, they helped ensure the work would be done right. It made each man accountable.

b. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he noted who did the work and who didn't – the list demonstrates this.

c. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he organized the work for maximum efficiency. Everyone had their section, and the work was organized around the gates – the places most needful of the work.

d. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he knew where to start. He began with the spiritual aspect of the work (the high priest's work is mentioned first), and by consecrating everything to God.

e. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he got both "high" and "low" to join together in doing the work. The leaders and the high priest worked together with the man who lived in a single room.

f. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he was willing to let people try new things – goldsmiths, priests, and perfumers all became construction workers.

g. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he made people focus on their own house first.

h. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he didn't disqualify people because of a past of sin and compromise.

Opposition to the Work

Neh 4:1 When Sanballat heard that we Jews had begun rebuilding the wall, he became furious and began to ridicule us.

Neh 4:2 In front of his companions and the Samaritan troops he said, "What do these miserable Jews think they're doing? Do they intend to rebuild the city? Do they think that by offering sacrifices they can finish the work in one day? Can they make building stones out of heaps of burnt rubble?"

Neh 4:3 Tobiah was standing there beside him, and he added, "What kind of wall could they ever build? Even a fox could knock it down!"

Neh 4:4 I prayed, "Hear how they make fun of us, O God! Let their ridicule fall on their own heads. Let them be robbed of everything they have, and let them be taken as prisoners to a foreign land.

Neh 4:5 Don't forgive the evil they do and don't forget their sins, for they have insulted us who are building."

Neh 4:6 So we went on rebuilding the wall, and soon it was half its full height, because the people were eager to work.

Neh 4:7 Sanballat, Tobiah, and the people of Arabia, Ammon, and Ashdod heard that we were making progress in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem and that the gaps in the wall were being closed, and they became very angry.

Neh 4:8 So they all plotted together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion,

Neh 4:9 but we prayed to our God and kept men on guard against them day and night.

Neh 4:10 The people of Judah had a song they sang: "We grow weak carrying burdens; There's so much rubble to take away. How can we build the wall today?"

Neh 4:11 Our enemies thought we would not see them or know what was happening until they were already upon us, killing us and putting an end to our work.

Neh 4:12 But time after time Jews who were living among our enemies came to warn us of the plans our enemies were making against us.

Neh 4:13 So I armed the people with swords, spears, and bows, and stationed them by clans behind the wall, wherever it was still unfinished.

Neh 4:14 I saw that the people were worried, so I said to them and to their leaders and officials, "Don't be afraid of our enemies. Remember how great and terrifying the Lord is, and fight for your relatives, your children, your wives, and your homes."

The Work Resumes

Neh 4:15 Our enemies heard that we had found out what they were plotting, and they realized that God had defeated their plans. Then all of us went back to rebuilding the wall.

Neh 4:16 From then on half of my men worked and half stood guard, wearing coats of armor and armed with spears, shields, and bows. And our leaders gave their full support to the people

Neh 4:17 who were rebuilding the wall. Even those who carried building materials worked with one hand and kept a weapon in the other,

Neh 4:18 and everyone who was building kept a sword strapped to their waist. The man who was to sound the alarm on the bugle stayed with me.

Neh 4:19 I told the people and their officials and leaders, "The work is spread out over such a distance that we are widely separated from one another on the wall.

Neh 4:20 If you hear the bugle, gather around me. Our God will fight for us."

Neh 4:21 So every day, from dawn until the stars came out at night, half of us worked on the wall, while the other half stood guard with spears.

Neh 4:22 During this time I told the men in charge that they and all their helpers had to stay in Jerusalem at night, so that we could guard the city at night as well as work in the daytime.

Neh 4:23 I didn't take off my clothes even at night, neither did any of my companions nor my servants nor my bodyguards. And we all kept our weapons at hand.

Nehemiah 4:1-23

Nehemiah 4 – Enemies Try to Stop the Work

A. Sanballat and Tobiah ridicule the work of God.

1. (1-3) The attempt to discourage the workers.

But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish; stones that are burned?" Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said,

“Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up *on it*, he will break down their stone wall.”

a. **But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant:** Sanballat and Tobiah were first *deeply disturbed* when they heard a man wanted to help the people of Jerusalem (Neh 2:10). Then they used scorn and intimidation to prevent the work from starting (Neh 2:19). Now that the work had begun, they were **furious and very indignant**.

b. **And mocked the Jews:** The nature of their discouraging attack is evident. They used a mocking, sarcastic tone and **mocked the Jews... these feeble Jews... will they... will they... will they... even if a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall**.

i. **Will they offer sacrifices** **sw** has the idea of, “Will they seek God through sacrifice and expect Him to miraculously build the walls? Will they pray the walls up?” **Will they complete it in a day** has the idea of “Do they have any idea what they are taking on? This isn’t an easy project.”

ii. Like most attacks of discouragement, there is a trace of truth in the words of the enemy. As builders, the Jews were **feeble**. They would not **complete it in a day**. They didn’t have the best materials to work with. A lying, discouraging attack will often have *some* truth in it, but it will neglect the great truth: *God was with them and has promised to see them through*.

iii. Sanballat and Tobiah sought to bring the discouragement through criticism. Charles Swindoll points out that there were many of them together doing the sarcastic, mocking criticism – and observes “critics run with critics.” One measure of a leader is to

be able to measure criticism; to not allow one to be run down by the critical, while still be sensitive to God's voice even in the midst of criticism.

iv. Discouragement is such a powerful weapon because it is somewhat the opposite of faith. Where faith believes God and His love and promises, discouragement looks for and believes the worst – and tends to pretty much forget about who God is and what He has promised to do.

c. **He will break down their stone wall:** Tobiah made a huge mistake. He called the wall ***their* stone wall**; it wasn't **their** wall at all, but God's – he was criticizing God's wall, God's work.

i. Critics who bring nothing but discouragement often miss what God is doing; because they don't like the wall, they can't believe it is God's work. In the same way, the church is God's church; Jesus loves His bride. One should always be careful about the way you talk about Jesus' bride.

d. **Furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews:** Because Nehemiah and the workers did in fact have legal protection from the king (proven by the *letters* mentioned in Neh 2:7), Sanballat and Tobiah had no authority to actually stop the work. All they could do was to discourage the Jews into stopping.

i. The exact same attack comes into the life of the believer who is legally set free by his King. Yet they can be discouraged into drawing back from what God has set before them.

ii. We work differently under faith or under discouragement. We pray differently under faith or under discouragement. We read and hear the word differently under faith or under discouragement. It is

no wonder that Satan works so hard to keep us from faith and keep us in discouragement.

iii. *Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.* (Heb 10:38-39)

2. (4-5) *Nehemiah comes against the discouraging attack with prayer.*

Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders.

a. **Hear, O our God:** Nehemiah's response was a great example. He didn't debate, he didn't form a committee, he didn't even deal with the two enemies directly. Instead, he took it to God in prayer.

i. For Nehemiah, prayer was a first resource, not a last resort. When times of opposition come, God wants us to rely on Him – and the purest way of expressing our reliance on God is through prayer.

b. **Hear, O our God, for we are despised:** In his prayer, Nehemiah first asked for God's attention and mercy. God did care about Nehemiah and the work of rebuilding, but Nehemiah needed God to *display* it and he also needed to *sense* God's presence and care.

c. **Turn their reproach on their own heads... give them as plunder... do not cover their iniquity:** Nehemiah then asked God to battle their enemies for them. He depended on God to fight the battle. God gave him a work to do, and he would not be distracted from it.

i. This prayer seems pretty tough, but prayers in the Psalms are even tougher: *Breath their teeth in their mouth, O God! (Psa 58:6) Let their dwelling place be desolate; let no one live in their tents (Psa 69:25)*. It is proper for a child of God to pray such a prayer because they are giving their violent inclinations over to God and letting *Him* deal with them.

ii. If we are angry and someone or have a real enemy, then we can go at them in prayer. Never in the sense of praying evil upon them, but in turning them over to a good and just God because He knows exactly what to do with them.

d. **They have provoked You to anger:** Finally, Nehemiah's prayer gave God a reason to show mercy and to come against his enemies. Nehemiah recognized that this was *God's* cause, not his own.

3. (6) *The result after the attack and Nehemiah's defense in prayer: the work continues on with greater and greater strength.*

So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its *height*, for the people had a mind to work.

a. **So we built the wall:** God answered the prayer by giving them all **a mind to work**. A **mind to work** is a gift from God, and no significant job will ever be accomplished until people come together with **a mind to work**.

i. This is exactly what Satan wants to destroy with his attacks – the **mind to work**. He wants to make us feel defeated, or passive, or self-focused, or discouraged.

ii. "Critics demoralize. Leaders encourage. When the critics spoke, the workmen heard them and were

demoralized. But when the capable leader stepped up and said, 'Let's look at it God's way, stay at the job,' the crew members were back in there." (Swindoll)

b. For the people had a mind to work: The immediate answer to the prayer made no difference in the enemies. The prayer was answered in the people of God doing the work. Nehemiah's prayer asked God to take care of his enemies, and God answered by taking care of His people.

i. We often miss God's answer of our prayers because we pray for Him to do a work in the lives of others we are in conflict with – and He answers by moving in our lives, but we resist that moving. It is as if He tried to give us **a mind to work** in a situation, but we resisted it.

c. The entire wall was joined together up to half its height: The work was half finished. It was an exciting, but dangerous time; much had been done, but much was left to do. Fatigue and discouragement were ready to set in, if given an opportunity.

B. Sanballat and Tobiah plan to lead a violent attack against the work.

1. (7-8) The conspiracy to attack the work.

Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

a. The gaps were beginning to be closed: The wall was only half as high as it should be, but it was almost continuous now. Therefore, the enemies of the work **became very angry.**

i. It must be that the work of God often makes the enemy of our soul angry. He must often rage against the progress being made by God's people in touching a lost world for Jesus Christ. It's not bad to make the devil angry.

b. **All of them conspired together to come and attack:** As the work progressed the enemies became more serious. Now they didn't simply complain or mock, they threatened and planned for violence.

i. On the one hand, this was serious: the wall was built to protect against the attacks of violence, and now it seemed that the very building of the wall may prompt an attack to come. It would have been easy for the people to fear and to think perhaps all their work would be made useless.

ii. On the other hand, this wasn't serious at all. We notice that they *didn't attack* – they just talked about it. Sanballat and Tobiah were hoping that the *threat* of attack would be enough. Satan uses the same strategy of fear against us, and if we are paralyzed by a threat the threat has worked – even when nothing actually happens against us.

c. **And create confusion:** This is an important strategy of Satan – to create confusion among the people of God. A confused people will never move forward and fulfill God's work. They are usually confused because they are distracted by the tricks of their enemies instead of focusing on God and His promises.

2. (9) *The attack defended by prayer and watching.*

Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

a. **Nevertheless we made our prayer to God:** Nothing would make them stop depending on God through prayer. They might have given up, believing the continued attack was a failure on God's part to answer prayer before – but they had more trust in God than that.

i. God allowed the attack to go on, even though He could have instantly swept it away. Yet He allowed it to continue because He was delighted that His people drew closer to Him with a deeper trust than ever before. God did His perfect work *both* in building the walls and His people.

b. **We set a watch:** They also knew that prayer didn't mean they were to do *nothing*. They used sanctified common sense to do what they should have, protecting against attack, using willing servants of God to *be* the wall until the wall was built.

i. It isn't hard to imagine some super-spiritual among them saying, "Now Nehemiah, we don't need to **set a watch**. We have prayed, and God will protect us." Nehemiah would likely respond, "Yes, God will protect us, and He will as He finds us doing our duty before Him. Set the guard."

ii. When we see an area of our Christian life that needs particular attention, it isn't enough to pray. You need to set a watch as well – give special attention and accountability to that area of your life until you are walking in consistent victory.

iii. Our prayers do not replace our actions; they make our actions effective for God's work.

c. **Day and night:** This shows that Nehemiah was determined. He wouldn't let the security of daylight or

the sleepiness of night keep him from the work. This sent a powerful message.

i. It sent a message to the people of God saying, "We are committed. This is going to succeed, because God is with us, and will enable us to overcome every obstacle."

ii. It sent a message to the enemies saying, "You will not succeed. God's work is going on and will not be stopped. We will make whatever sacrifices necessary to see it done – weary days, sleepless nights, it doesn't matter."

iii. It sent a message to God: "We trust in You, and our faith is a living faith – a faith of actions, not just words. We love and trust You, LORD."

C. Challenges from the inside and the outside.

1. (10) The challenge from the inside: discouragement among the people because the work seemed too big.

Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and *there is* so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall."

a. **Then Judah said:** Judah was supposed to be the strongest, bravest tribe. It was the tribe of great kings and ultimately, the Messiah Himself. It was a special challenge and a discouragement to have this word come from the tribe of Judah.

i. Nehemiah and the Jews rebuilding Jerusalem have been standing strong in the face of attack; but now that the rebuilding work is at the half-way point, and wall is almost continuous, special challenges arise.

b. **The strength of the laborers is failing:** The half-way point (mentioned in Neh 4:6) is a dangerous place.

Much remains to be done, but fatigue sets in because much has already been done.

i. It isn't enough to just begin well. Many a team has had a great first half – only to lose in the final minutes. The rebuilding work has gone very well and many obstacles have been overcome – but the job isn't done yet, the game isn't over yet, there is still time to lose.

c. **There is so much rubbish:** The work of rebuilding the walls was not only construction, but cleaning and hauling away the rubbish. The ruins of the walls, lying in waste for 100 years had become a collecting point for all kinds of rubbish.

i. Clearing away the rubbish was not an option – it had to be done. The destroyed parts of the wall and the accumulated rubbish had to be cleared away so the walls could be rebuilt upon their foundations. If they didn't do this, the walls wouldn't stand at all.

ii. In our Christian life, nothing much can be built for God's glory unless rubbish is swept away as well. Taking out the garbage can be discouraging work – but it must be done.

e. **We are not able to build the wall:** So, the excavation work had to start. Before they could build the walls up, they had to tear down and clear away the rubbish. They had to go down before they could go up.

i. It was difficult because often, the work of building is a lot easier – or more fun – than clearing away the rubbish.

ii. It was difficult because as the mound of rubbish was torn down, the city was even more vulnerable than before. We can see some thinking, "Don't take

away the rubbish; our enemies are near, and you merely clear a path for them to come in."

iii. It was difficult because there have always been those who will defend any heap of rubbish, no matter how useless it is. "Well, my grandfather had that pile of rubbish, and if it was good enough for him, it is good enough for us!" This is bad thinking; we should clear away the old, so we can build on the true foundation.

iv. The heart of the people as shown in verse 10 must have been a discouragement for Nehemiah; it's easy to lead when your followers are full of enthusiasm and have a heart to work. But what do you do when that begins to fade?

2. (11) The challenge from the outside: the enemies plan a surprise attack.

And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease."

a. **And our adversaries said:** Verse ten may mark the lowest point in the spirits of those doing the work. Things were already in a bad state, and the discouraged workers felt like giving up. *Now*, the enemy planned its raid on the workers, to crush those rebuilding the walls.

b. **They will neither know nor see anything:** It is doubtful these enemies knew exactly how discouraged the people of God were. But certainly, the counsels of spiritual darkness in high places knew – and the attack was planned.

i. We can almost imagine the spiritual ranks of darkness suggesting to the adversaries of God's people: "Now! Now is the time to attack! Do not

delay, and you will crush them!" They knew Israel's state of discouragement made an evil victory possible.

ii. The attacks we suffer from spiritual forces of darkness are just as strategically timed. Our spiritual enemies know when we are discouraged, tired, angry, or proud in self-confidence.

c. **They will neither know nor see anything:** Often, attacks from the adversary are successful only if they come as a surprise. When God's people are on guard, the enemy sees little victory.

d. **Kill them and cause the work to cease:** The enemies of God's people paid a back-handed compliment by saying this. They knew by now the only way to get them to stop serving God and doing His work was to **kill them**.

i. This cannot be said of every servant of God today. For many, the devil does not have to kill them because discouragement, compromise, money, relationships, frustration, or trouble get them to stop serving God.

3. (12) God allows the Jews to be warned about the coming attack.

So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us."

a. **The Jews who dwelt near them came:** This is a wonderful example of the power and goodness of God. The enemies of God and His people did their best, but God was always in control. The enemies did not know there were faithful Jews listening to their plotting.

b. **They told us ten times:** It is easy to picture this scene, and see the informants repeating over and over again, "An attack is coming! It's for real! They will defeat

us!" **From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us!**

- i. These who overheard the plan didn't have the wisdom to know what to do in response. They were in a panic, and they were probably troubled that Nehemiah didn't also panic.

4. (13-14) *Nehemiah organizes the defense.*

Therefore I positioned *men* behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

a. **Therefore:** These verses tell us what Nehemiah did, but we can also think of what Nehemiah *could* have done in this situation.

- i. He could have done *nothing* – and even been spiritual about it. "Well brother, we're just trusting in the Lord. We prayed about it and believe the Lord will deliver us somehow."

- ii. He could have *panicked* – and started thinking it was his job alone to defend against the attack.

- iii. What he did was to *wisely and calmly trust God* in the midst of the storm, and to do the concrete things God would have him do to obtain the victory.

b. **Their swords, their spears, and their bows:** Nehemiah commanded them to bring out their armor. It was time to get serious, to put on the full armor, and to get ready to fight with every resource they had.

c. **Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome:** Nehemiah put their mind in the right perspective. The challenge was great but there was no reason for fear. He who was *in them* was greater than he who was in the world.

d. **Fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses:** Nehemiah reminded them what they were fighting for. We fight most effectively for the Lord when we keep in mind how much there is to lose.

5. (15) *The enemies shrink back.*

And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and *that* God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work.

a. **When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing:** Once they saw the defenses of the people of God, the enemies shrunk back. They didn't want a battle because they knew they would lose. What the enemies wanted was for the people of God to hand them the victory on a silver platter through failing to watch and be ready.

b. **All of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work:** *This* was the victory. Defending against the attack was not the victory; the people of God would not be at peace and security until the wall was rebuilt. Getting on with the work was the victory.

i. When we are under spiritual attack it is easy to feel that just enduring the storm is the victory. It isn't. The attack often comes to prevent your *progress and work* for the LORD. Victory is enduring the attack *and* continuing the progress and work for the LORD.

6. (16-18) *The sword and the trowel.*

So it was, from that time on, *that* half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and *wore* armor; and the leaders *were* behind all the house of Judah. Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet *was* beside me.

a. So that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon: Some of the servants did the work of defending and some did the work of building. The workers had a sword at their side and a trowel in their hands to get the work done. The kingdom of God is built with both a sword and a trowel, a sword to come against every spiritual force of wickedness in high places, and trowel to do the work of building up the people of God.

7. (19-23) Plans are made to keep a ready defense.

Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, "The work *is* great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." So we labored in the work, and half of *the men* held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. At the same time I also said to the people, "Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day." So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, *except* that everyone took them off for washing.

a. **The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another:** Nehemiah knew they had to keep in communication if the work was going to be done. The trumpets were a new way of communication there to meet the challenge.

b. **Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there:** They stayed ready to sound the alarm at the slightest notice. They would not be caught off guard.

c. **From daybreak until the stars appeared:** They dedicated themselves to the work all the more, working hard from sunrise to past dark, even spending the night out at the job site to protect against attack.

d. **So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes:** They kept their clothes on all the time because they did not want to be caught unprepared. They were always ready to respond to the blast of a trumpet.

i. Christians need to be armed with the same attitude today. They need to be always ready, always clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, always wearing the armor of God, ready for that final trumpet blast that will gather us together with our LORD.

Nehemiah Stops Oppression of the Poor

Neh 5:1 Some time later many of the people, both men and women, began to complain against the other Jews.

Neh 5:2 Some said, "We have large families, we need grain to keep us alive."

Neh 5:3 Others said, "We have had to mortgage our fields and vineyards and houses to get enough grain to keep us from starving."

Neh 5:4 Still others said, "We had to borrow money to pay the royal tax on our fields and vineyards.

Neh 5:5 We are of the same race as the other Jews. Aren't our children just as good as theirs? But we have to make slaves of our children. Some of our daughters have already been sold as slaves. We are helpless because our fields and vineyards have been taken away from us."

Neh 5:6 When I heard their complaints, I grew angry

Neh 5:7 and decided to act. I denounced the leaders and officials of the people and told them, "You are oppressing your own relatives!" I called a public assembly to deal with the problem

Neh 5:8 and said, "As far as we have been able, we have been buying back our Jewish relatives who had to sell themselves to foreigners. Now you are forcing your own relatives to sell themselves to you, their own people!" The leaders were silent and could find nothing to say.

Neh 5:9 Then I said, "What you are doing is wrong! You ought to obey God and do what's right. Then you would not give our enemies, the Gentiles, any reason to ridicule us.

Neh 5:10 I have let the people borrow money and grain from me, and so have my companions and those who work for me. Now let's give up all our claims to repayment.

Neh 5:11 Cancel all the debts they owe you—money or grain or wine or olive oil. And give them back their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses right now!"

Neh 5:12 The leaders replied, "We'll do as you say. We'll give the property back and not try to collect the debts." I called in the priests and made the leaders swear in front of them to keep the promise they had just made.

Neh 5:13 Then I took off the sash I was wearing around my waist and shook it out. "This is how God will shake any of you who don't keep your promise," I said. "God will take away your houses and everything you own, and will leave

you with nothing." Everyone who was present said, "Amen!" and praised the LORD. And the leaders kept their promise.

Nehemiah's Generosity

Neh 5:14 During all the twelve years that I was governor of the land of Judah, from the twentieth year that Artaxerxes was emperor until his thirty-second year, neither my relatives nor I ate the food I was entitled to have as governor.

Neh 5:15 Every governor who had been in office before me had been a burden to the people and had demanded forty silver coins a day for food and wine. Even their servants had oppressed the people. But I acted differently, because I honored God.

Neh 5:16 I put all my energy into rebuilding the wall and did not acquire any property. Everyone who worked for me joined in the rebuilding.

Neh 5:17 I regularly fed at my table a hundred and fifty of the Jewish people and their leaders, besides all the people who came to me from the surrounding nations.

Neh 5:18 Every day I served one beef, six of the best sheep, and many chickens, and every ten days I provided a fresh supply of wine. But I knew what heavy burdens the people had to bear, and so I did not claim the allowance that the governor is entitled to.

Neh 5:19 I pray you, O God, remember to my credit everything that I have done for this people.

Nehemiah 5:1-19

Nehemiah 5 – The Work Is Threatened Internally

A. Financial problems threaten the work.

1. (1) A **great outcry of the people** stops the work of rebuilding the wall.

And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.

a. **And there was:** Chapter four ended on a note of great victory. The people of God were doing the work of God, and they did it despite all obstacles. They worked with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other, and they would not let their enemies stop them. But in this section of chapter five, there is no mention of working on the wall, indicating that the work had stopped.

b. **Against their Jewish brethren:** The work stopped because of *strife among God's people*. The enemy could not stop the work of God by direct attack, but the work stopped when God's people weren't unified and working together.

i. **A great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren** meant one group fought against another. When God's people fight one another they certainly are neither fighting the real enemy nor getting God's work done.

2. (2-5) *The reason for strife among God's people: money problems.*

For there were those who said, "We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live." There were also some who said, "We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine." There were also those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards. Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards."

a. We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live:

Nehemiah is not primarily a book about money; it is a book about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and bringing God's people into a place of peace, security, and blessing. Yet money problems directly affected the rebuilding work.

i. Most the time money problems affect a building project because there isn't enough money to do the work. But the job of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem seems to have been paid for by the king of Persia, who provided the necessary building materials for Nehemiah (Neh 1:8) and sent him with royal guards (Neh 1:9).

ii. Nehemiah's money problems were different; they were money problems among the people that harmed the unity among the people of God.

b. Let us get grain for them, that we may eat:

People had money problems because they worked hard on the walls and did not spend the same time on providing for the needs of their household.

i. If you want to spend much time directly ministering to the needs of God's people and in spreading the gospel, in most cases it will affect your ability to provide. Ministry takes time, and time spent on ministry is time you aren't making money. If one gets to the place where the ministry is your way of making a living, one should be used to not making a lot of money – or the transition will be rather difficult.

c. Because of the famine: People had money problems because there was a famine, which made food more expensive. It was so expensive that some mortgaged their property to provide food.

i. A famine is no one's fault; many of the financial problems people face are really not the fault of anyone. Yet there may be fault in how the problems are addressed.

d. **For the king's tax:** People had money problems because the government kept taxing them even though they weren't working as much and even though the cost of living went up.

i. These taxes were not the fault of those who were hurt by them. Neither Nehemiah nor the people acted as if these taxes were unfair, yet they were still a hardship.

e. **We have borrowed money... indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves:** People had financial problems because the loans they had taken out to live cost interest, and some were in default. Therefore, some had to give their children as servants to their lenders to pay off the debt.

i. As will be indicated later (Neh 5:11, *the hundredth part*), the rich were taking advantage of the crisis to make money off the poor, charging 12% interest a year.

ii. It isn't unusual for money problems to create strife and completely disrupt what God wants to do. If Nehemiah and his people did not find a way to do what God wanted them to do with their money and money problems, the work of God would be stopped – without a single arrow being fired by the enemies of God.

ii. We sometimes want to separate what we do with our money from our walk with God. This is a huge deception from Satan. Buying a house is a spiritual decision, not just a financial one. Taking a job,

choosing a career, deciding how much money you should make – all these are matters that will directly affect your walk with God, both now and in the future.

iii. If we don't handle our money with the right heart, and make financial decisions with an eye to eternity, we can make mistakes that will affect the work of God in our lives for years and years.

iv. Essential to handling our money with the right heart before God is being a giver. Being a giver to the work of the Lord helps us always remember that God and His kingdom come first. The New Testament tells us our giving should be regular, thoughtful, proportional, and private (1Co 16:1-4); that it must be generous, freely given, and cheerful (2 Corinthians 9).

v. Money problems are rarely only money problems. We often think if we just had more money, our money problems would go away. It isn't true – and that's a proven fact, just by looking at the lives of many of those that win a lottery or come into unexpected riches. If they had money problems before – if they didn't know how to handle their money and glorify God with it – they won't know after. The same problems will soon show up again, often times bigger than ever.

3. (6) Nehemiah's immediate reaction: anger.

And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

a. **And I became very angry:** Nehemiah became angry because these money problems were caused, in part, because of the greed of those who wanted to make a

profit off of the money troubles of others, something Moses' law clearly said was wrong (Exo 22:25).

b. I became very angry when I heard their outcry: Nehemiah became angry because these money problems led to a lack of unity among the people of God. This unity that was more precious than any amount of money.

c. I heard their outcry and these words: No mention was made of the work on the walls. Nehemiah got angry because these money problems stopped the work of the LORD in rebuilding the walls. It must have frustrated him that they could stand so strong against an enemy but fall so quickly to these kinds of problems.

4. (7-11) Nehemiah's wise response: confronting those who were in the wrong.

After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother." So I called a great assembly against them. And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?" Then they were silenced and found nothing to say. Then I said, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? I also, *with* my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury! Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them."

a. After serious thought: This was great leadership from Nehemiah. He was a man passionate enough to get

angry; but wise enough to not act until he had considered the matter carefully.

b. I rebuked the nobles and the rulers: Nehemiah was no coward. When people were in the wrong, he confronted them. He told the truth, and from the result (Neh 5:12-13), we can judge that he must have told the truth in love.

i. Nehemiah teaches us that the way a leader should approach problems is head on.

c. Each of you is exacting usury from his brother: Usury is interest that is either too high or should not be charged at all. The Bible says it is wrong to make money off of someone's financial need; if someone needs money for the most basic needs of life, they should be given money, not loaned it at interest.

i. Of course, loaning money at interest is permitted for things that are not absolute necessities. Yet God's people must always use great wisdom and self-control in borrowing money.

d. We have redeemed our Jewish brethren: Nehemiah noted that when Judah was conquered, many Jews were sold as slaves to foreigners and many of them had been bought out of slavery by other Jews. Because of this, it was very wrong to have Jews being sold into slavery to other Jews because they couldn't pay off high-interest loans.

e. Should you not walk in the fear of our God: This is where many business deals go wrong before God because there is no regard for God's will or wisdom. The only concern is if a deal can be made, and if money will come from it; not if it is right or wrong.

f. Restore now to them, even this day: Nehemiah was not asking the nobles and the rulers to just feel bad,

or to just stop what they were doing; they had to set the wrong they had done right. If money had been charged unfairly or collateral was taken unfairly, it had to be set right.

5. (12-13) The response of the rulers and nobles who had done wrong.

So they said, "We will restore *it*, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say." Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise.

a. **We will restore it:** This was good. Nehemiah wisely told the truth in love, confronting these brothers; and they received the rebuke, doing the right thing and admitting they had been wrong.

i. Their teachable, correctable spirit was impressive; too few are willing to admit they are wrong and to do what is right – especially if money is involved.

b. **So may God shake out each man... who does not perform this promise:** Nehemiah wisely knew their words were not enough. Their actions had to be followed through with real action – and it was: **the people did according to this promise.**

i. With the oaths, and public record of all this, Nehemiah assures accountability – something we often need to help us do what our spirit is willing to do, but our flesh is weak to do! Perhaps accountability

is a missing step in dealing with an area where *you* are having a hard time doing what is right.

B. Nehemiah's godly example.

1. (14-16) Nehemiah did not tax the people.

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions. But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God. Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work.

a. Neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions: Nehemiah was a great example of putting the work of God ahead of his own personal interest. He certainly had the right to tax the people for his support (others had done it before him), but he didn't take that right because it wouldn't help the work of God.

i. The apostle Paul is another great example of someone who had the right to be supported but didn't take that right because it was better for the cause of the gospel (1Co 9:1-15).

ii. Should ministers be supported today? It is all a question of what is better for the cause of the gospel. If it is better for a minister to be able to devote himself full time to the care and teaching of God's people, he should be supported. If it is better for him not to be supported that way, he shouldn't. There's

something wrong with a minister who will only minister to God's people if the money is right.

b. **Because of the fear of God:** Nehemiah did what was right before God, not what was "right" for his own cares and concerns – because he knew he would have to answer to God.

c. **I did not do so, because of the fear of God:** Nehemiah could say this because it didn't matter to him what others did, how the crowd acted, what the rest of the world thought. He lived by another standard. We should have even better standard than Nehemiah did, and we should say, when confronted by the sin this world takes for granted, *I did not do so, because of the love of Jesus.*

2. (17-18) Nehemiah's example of generosity.

And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. Now *that* which was prepared daily was one ox *and* six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people.

a. **And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers:** Nehemiah not only did not take when he could have; he also gave when he didn't have to. He received a lot of food from the king's provisions, which he could have sold for his own profit. Instead, he gave them away to be the example of generosity – feeding as many as 150 people regularly.

b. **Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions:** Nehemiah could have taken more (**the governor's provisions**), but he didn't.

Therefore, Nehemiah was an example for what he did not take and for what he did not keep.

c. Because the bondage was heavy on this people:

Nehemiah, in his own life, lived the way he told the nobles and rulers to live – to not take personal advantage of another's need. He did what every godly leader must do: he never expected more of his followers than he expected of himself.

3. (19) *Nehemiah's prayer, asking God to remember his good deeds.*

Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

a. **Remember me, my God:** Some think that Nehemiah was wrong for saying all the good things he did. Jesus clearly taught us that our good works must not be done to show others how spiritual we are.

i. Mat 6:1-4 : *Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.*

b. **Remember me, my God, for good:** But in his prayer, Nehemiah did not look for praise from man – but from God. In fact, Nehemiah probably originally intended that no one else see all or part of this book, because it was written as a diary.

i. In our own private time with the LORD, it is entirely appropriate – and right – to say, “*Remember me, my God, for good*” – to have confidence in our heavenly reward, instead of the praise of men.

c. According to all that I have done for this people:

We should be glad that God took this personal diary of Nehemiah and gave it to us. It shows us that a leader must first lead by example, and that Nehemiah could tell others to do what was right here because his own walk was right. His public words and private actions said the same thing.

Conspiracy Against Nehemiah

Neh 6:1 Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and the rest of our enemies heard that we had finished building the wall and that there were no gaps left in it, although we still had not set up the gates in the gateways.

Neh 6:2 So Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message, suggesting that I meet with them in one of the villages in the Plain of Ono. This was a trick of theirs to try to harm me.

Neh 6:3 I sent messengers to say to them, "I am doing important work and can't go down there. I am not going to let the work stop just to go and see you."

Neh 6:4 They sent me the same message four times, and each time I sent them the same reply.

Neh 6:5 Then Sanballat sent one of his servants to me with a fifth message, this one in the form of an unsealed letter.

Neh 6:6 It read: "Geshem tells me that a rumor is going around among the neighboring peoples that you and the Jewish people intend to revolt and that this is why you are rebuilding the wall. He also says you plan to make yourself king

Neh 6:7 and that you have arranged for some prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem that you are the king of Judah. His Majesty is certain to hear about this, so I suggest that you and I meet to talk the situation over."

Neh 6:8 I sent a reply to him: "Nothing of what you are saying is true. You have made it all up yourself."

Neh 6:9 They were trying to frighten us into stopping work. I prayed, "But now, God, make me strong!"

Neh 6:10 About this time I went to visit Shemaiah, the son of Delaiah and grandson of Mehetabel, who was unable to leave his house. He said to me, "You and I must go and hide together in the Holy Place of the Temple and lock the doors, because they are coming to kill you. Any night now they will come to kill you."

Neh 6:11 I answered, "I'm not the kind of person that runs and hides. Do you think I would try to save my life by hiding in the Temple? I won't do it."

Neh 6:12 When I thought it over, I realized that God had not spoken to Shemaiah, but that Tobiah and Sanballat had bribed him to give me this warning.

Neh 6:13 They hired him to frighten me into sinning, so that they could ruin my reputation and humiliate me.

Neh 6:14 I prayed, "God, remember what Tobiah and Sanballat have done and punish them. Remember that woman Noadiah and all the other prophets who tried to frighten me."

The Wall Is Finished

Neh 6:15 After fifty-two days of work the entire wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul.

Neh 6:16 When our enemies in the surrounding nations heard this, they realized that they had lost face, since everyone knew that the work had been done with God's help.

Neh 6:17 During all this time the Jewish leaders had been in correspondence with Tobiah.

Neh 6:18 Many people in Judah were on his side because of his Jewish father-in-law, Shecaniah son of Arah. In addition, his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah.

Neh 6:19 People would talk in front of me about all the good deeds Tobiah had done and would tell him everything I said. And he kept sending me letters to try to frighten me.

Nehemiah 6:1-19

Nehemiah 6 – The Walls Completed

A. Nehemiah is attacked in three phases.

1. (1-4) The snare of the enemy's friendship.

Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that* there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm. So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.

- a. **Our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall:**
The wall was almost finished – the gaps were closed, but the gates were not yet finished. For the enemies of Nehemiah and the work of God, this was a "now-or-never" time. If they didn't do something immediately to stop the work, the walls will be completely finished.

b. Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono: At this time, Sanballat and Geshem tried to arrange a meeting with Nehemiah – by appearances, a friendly meeting, perhaps even a reconciliation or a vacation. Their invitation may have had the sense of a break for a few days of rest and relaxation out on the plain of Ono.

c. But they thought to do me harm: Nehemiah was equipped to see through the outward appearance, and to understand what Sanballat's friendly offer was all about.

i. "Whether you be a pastor or a teacher or evangelist or Sunday school leader, or whatever your position may be in Christian leadership, let me say that there will always be those who are friendly to your face, but plan your downfall behind your back. Beware of the fawning, flattering Christian who is always fluttering around you, and who behind your back will be the first to rejoice when you go down." (Redpath)

d. But they thought to do me harm: Nehemiah was equipped with *discernment*.

i. Discernment is the ability to judge matters according to God's view of them, and not according to their outward appearance. We are often deceived by outward appearances; *For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. (1Sa 16:7).*

ii. Many people confuse being discerning with being negative or cynical; but discernment is just as able to see the good where others might miss it as it is at seeing bad where others might see good according to the outward appearance.

iii. Christians today suffer a great deal because they lack discernment. They follow leaders and teachers

who give a good appearance, but don't walk in the nature of Jesus. They accept things blindly because it looks good or sounds good, without carefully judging it against the whole counsel of God's Word. We might even picture Nehemiah going to the Word of God and equipping himself with discernment. Perhaps he read Pro 27:6 : *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful*. That passage alone would remind him to not look to outward appearances, but to judge soberly.

iv. How can we develop discernment? First, if you want to see things as God sees them, get to know His Word. Second, discernment comes through spiritual maturity; Heb 5:12-14 says that discernment is something spiritual babies don't have (a baby will stick *anything* in his mouth). Third, discernment can be given as a gift from the Holy Spirit (1Co 12:10). Seek Him for it.

v. Without discernment, we can think a dangerous invitation from an enemy is really an offer of reconciliation. We can think presumption is faith. We can think our own noble desires are God's promises. We can think God is saying "now" or "later" when He is really saying "later" or "now." We can think someone is a great guy or a spiritual leader when they are really doing damage to God's people.

e. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you: Nehemiah, using discernment will not only escape their trap; he won't even be distracted from his work.

i. If the enemy can *distract* God's people, then he has won; if we can start majoring on minors, and minoring on majors, we've lost our effectiveness for the work of the LORD.

ii. Nehemiah was *persistent* in his discernment; the request came four times, and each time Nehemiah stood fast and didn't fall for it.

f. **I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you:** Discernment gave Nehemiah *focus*; he knew what God wanted him to be doing and he did it. He wouldn't be sidetracked by things that sounded good but weren't of the LORD for him.

i. Anyone doing a work for God must contend with a hundred different noble causes, and a hundred things that might look good – and be good – but they are not what they are called to do at that time. Discernment gives us focus.

2. (5-9) *The subtlety of the enemy's slander.*

Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. In it was written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, *that* you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, '*There is* a king in Judah!' Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together. Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart." For they all *were trying to* make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done." Now therefore, *O God*, strengthen my hands.

a. **It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says:** Sanballat's slander began the way many verbal

attacks do, as a report of what others have reportedly said.

i. Vague accusations often sound like “Everyone is talking about” or, “A number of people are saying.” Such vague words can very easily give the wrong impression.

ii. What Sanballat accused Nehemiah of was *false*. If a thousand nations reported it, it would not make it true. A popular lie may be more dangerous, but it is not truer because it is popular.

b. The Jews plan to rebel... that you may be their king... you have also appointed prophets to proclaim: These lies probably outraged Nehemiah. He had worked hard and trusted God greatly, so this work would be done with the blessing of the king; and he had embraced great personal sacrifice to demonstrate that he was not in this for himself. And Nehemiah would never dream of going to “rent a prophet”! Now he is accused of the very things he has worked so hard to not fall into!

i. We may as well accept it: the devil knows our hot buttons. He knows those lies, those accusations, which really get to you – and he knows how to throw them in your face. We can’t stop it, so we have to learn how to deal with it!

c. These matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together. Now Sanballat made a plain threat. Nehemiah wouldn’t be deceived into coming to this meeting (he had too much discernment for that); so now he tried slander against Nehemiah.

d. You invent them in your own heart: Nehemiah replied by calmly and straightforwardly telling Sanballat that he was a liar, and by carrying on with the work.

i. Nehemiah did not mount an elaborate defense, trying to prove Sanballat wrong point by point. He wasn't going to waste his time. You don't satisfy men like Sanballat with facts, explanations, and evidence. You satisfy them by giving in to their demands, and Nehemiah would not!

ii. Sanballat would not be defeated by being told he was a liar. He didn't care if the whole world thought he was a liar if *he could only cause the work to stop*. But Nehemiah was steadfast!

e. **They are trying to make us afraid:** Nehemiah had the discernment to see the slander strategy was all about fear, and he wouldn't give into it. No enemy can make us afraid; all they can do is try to make us choose fear – but it is up to us to choose it.

i. Many people live paralyzed by the fear of what others are saying about them, or what they might say about them. Instead, we should forget about it in these situations. People will talk anyway and there is little you can do about it, other than be determined that you will *not* make you afraid.

ii. One of Benjamin Franklin's proverbs from *Poor Richard's Almanac* wisely says: "Since I cannot govern my own tongue, tho' within my own teeth, how can I hope to govern the tongues of others?"

iii. "No man can lead a work of God if he allows himself to be governed by what other people think. He is to secure help, fellowship, prayer, advice, and he is foolish not to take it; but if his ultimate decisions are based on popular opinion he is going to fail."
(Redpath)

f. **Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands:** We must do what Nehemiah did – pray for God's strength,

His power in our lives. We can overcome the slander and fear of our enemies in our own strength. It will be said, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God.

3. (10-14) *The scandal of the enemy's religion.*

Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you." And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who *is there* such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced *this* prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so *that* they might have *cause* for an evil report, that they might reproach me. My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

a. **Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah:** This man **Shemaiah** was said to be a prophet (**he pronounced this prophecy**), but he was not. Shemaiah offered Nehemiah a safe haven in the temple. The idea was that though Nehemiah was said to be threatened, he could find refuge in the temple.

i. It sure sounds reasonable – and one might even take some Scripture to support it: Psa 61:4 says, *I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.* Nehemiah needed discernment now more than ever.

b. Should a man such as I flee: Nehemiah, knowing the heart of God as it is revealed in the whole counsel of God's Word, had discernment. Shemaiah tried to create fear in Nehemiah and tried to get him to disobey God based on this fear.

i. Only priests were allowed in the temple, and Nehemiah was not a priest. He would have been disobeying God if he had done what Shemaiah suggested. In 2 Chronicles 26, King Uzziah – who was not a priest – went into the temple, and God instantly struck him with leprosy.

ii. "He seeks to persuade Nehemiah into an easy-going, compromising religion that will shirk persecution, that will carry no cross, and that is governed by fear of the opinions of other people." (Redpath)

c. Let us meet together in the house of God: Shemaiah knew how to use religious talk, but it was still a trap. If Nehemiah believed Shemaiah's religious talk, he would sin and give others something to find fault with and discredit him with.

d. And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in: Nehemiah stood brave against this religious deception. In his commitment to obedience, God revealed to him the heart of Shemaiah – who was no true prophet. Instead, he was on Sanballat's payroll.

e. My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat: Best of all, instead of lashing out against Shemaiah and his fellow false-religionists, he simply committed these wicked men – and the situation – to God. If God could take good care of Nehemiah, then He could take also take care of Shemaiah according to divine wisdom.

- i. Nehemiah's response to the three-fold attack of pretended friendship, slander, and false religion makes us admire him as a leader. But we can love and admire Jesus far more.
- ii. "Come down to the plain of Ono," they said to Nehemiah. But they said to Jesus, "come down from the cross." But Jesus was doing a great work – the greatest work – on the cross and would not be stopped.
- ii. They slandered Nehemiah, but he didn't defend Himself. He spoke the truth and trusted in God. Jesus was also slandered and did not debate His critics – He spoke the truth and trusted in His Father in heaven.
- iii. A false prophet offered Nehemiah an easy way out – but it was a way of fear and disobedience. Nehemiah would have none of it. Jesus was also offered a way out of the cross from Satan – just worship Satan, and all the kingdoms of the world would be delivered to Him. But Jesus would have none of it.

B. Completion of the wall.

1. (15-16) The wall is completed in 52 days.

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.

- a. **So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days:** The amount of time it took to finish the job was remarkably short. The walls were in ruins for more than 100 years, and then they were set right in a period of only 52 days.

i. Why wasn't the job done in the more than 100 years before? It wasn't that no one saw the problem; it wasn't that walls were not wanted. Many people saw broken walls, knew how they ruined the lives of the people of Jerusalem, but no one got past the place of just *wishing* there were walls.

ii. Finally, there came a man who did more than wish Jerusalem had walls; he grieved, he ached, he prayed, he planned, he asked boldly, he went, he fought, he encouraged, he stood strong, he saw the job through to completion. But he also had people around him with the same kind of heart.

iii. We have such small ideas of how God can use us. God used a man named Nehemiah to set right a 100-year-old problem in less than two months – and the same God sits on a throne in heaven and works through you today.

b. **In fifty-two days:** At the beginning, when he saw the need, Nehemiah prayed for four months (the difference in time between Neh 1:1; Neh 2:1). But the work itself took less than two months. Nehemiah worked longer in prayer than they needed to work to do the job.

i. This shows the spiritual battle was actually greater than the material battle. We are often told this, but it can be hard to believe!

c. **And all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes:** When the wall was finished, their enemies **were very disheartened**. It is a glorious thing to dishearten the enemies of God's people and to let them be discouraged for a while.

i. The battles were hard; the work was big; there were challenges from within and without. But the job

was now finished, and victory was sweet.

d. They perceived that this work was done by our God: Their enemies were disheartened not just because the wall was finished, but especially because it was evident that God did the work. When something has the fingerprints of God on it, all our enemies notice it also.

i. The enemy is *only* disheartened when God does the work. If it is the product of man's efforts, they just laugh. Men might be fooled, and see a work of man and be impressed, but angels in heaven and every demon in hell know what has been done by man and what has been done by God.

ii. A strong, secure people of Jerusalem were a witness to surrounding nations. Many of us live Christian lives that no one takes notice of, because our walls are broken down. Let the LORD do a building work, and others will notice.

2. (17-19) The work is finished despite some who were friends with the enemy Tobiah.

Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came to them. For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

a. Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah: Tobiah was the man who had opposed the rebuilding work with Sanballat. In Neh 2:10 he was disturbed that Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls. In Neh 2:19; Neh 4:3 he mocked Nehemiah's work. In Neh 4:7 he was angry that the work was being

done. In Neh 6:1 he was one of the men who tried to get Nehemiah to stop the work and come to the plain of Ono where he could be attacked.

b. For many in Judah were pledged to him: Yet, the **nobles of Judah** had no trouble being friends to such a man – because he had family ties to many in the tribe of Judah. In fact, they tried to recommend him to Nehemiah (**they reported his good deeds before me**).

i. These Jewish brothers of Nehemiah could not see what was so plain to Nehemiah. Perhaps they did not see much of the evil work of Tobiah first-hand, so they had a hard time believing it. We imagine them saying, “He’s always been nice to us; look at all the good he has done.”

ii. It is also possible they just didn’t have the shepherd’s heart, and shepherd’s eyes Nehemiah had. Nehemiah was called of God to protect God’s people and God’s work; he was watching and on guard in a way that others were not.

iii. Also, in the case of these nobles, there was self-interest at work. They had financial dealings with Tobiah they wanted to protect. “His numerous binding agreements (**pledged to him**) within the Jewish community were probably trading contracts, facilitated by marriage connections.” (Kidner)

c. They reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him: Undoubtedly, they saw Nehemiah as the bad guy. They figured Tobiah’s deeds were good, and Nehemiah spoke some strong words against Tobiah (in Neh 4:4, Nehemiah prays the evil Tobiah planned be turned back upon him, and that he be captured and carried away).

i. Nehemiah had to be willing to be seen as the bad guy in order to do what is right by the people of God. He could see what the nobles of Judah could not. He knew that Tobiah's **good deeds** were not the whole story – all the while, Tobiah was sending frightening letters to Nehemiah. Those letters were not one of Tobiah's good deeds.

ii. "Tobiah's friends acted as a Fifth Column. They attempted both to propagandize on behalf of Tobiah and to act as an intelligence system for him. Tobiah himself kept on trying to frighten Nehemiah." (Yamauchi)

d. **Tobiah sent letters to frighten me:** Nehemiah wrote no more about this situation. He wasn't going to demand the nobles change their minds about Tobiah; but he wasn't going to deny what he knew to be true about Tobiah either. He seems willing to let it go and let God take care of it.

i. Nehemiah had a work to do, and that work was not really going out to attack people like Tobiah. He could leave the Tobiahs alone, as long as they weren't attacking the work of God.

Neh 7:1 And now the wall had been rebuilt, the gates had all been put in place, and the Temple guards, the members of the sacred choir, and the other Levites had been assigned their work.

Neh 7:2 I put two men in charge of governing the city of Jerusalem: my brother Hanani and Hananiah, commanding officer of the fortress. Hananiah was a reliable and God-fearing man without equal.

Neh 7:3 I told them not to have the gates of Jerusalem opened in the morning until well after sunrise and to have them closed and barred before the guards went off duty at sunset. I also told them to appoint guards from among the

people who lived in Jerusalem and to assign some of them to specific posts and others to patrol the area around their own houses.

Neh 7:4 Jerusalem was a large city, but not many people were living in it, and not many houses had been built yet.

Lists of Returned Exiles

Neh 7:5 God inspired me to assemble the people and their leaders and officials and to check their family records. I located the records of those who had first returned from captivity, and this is the information I found:

Neh 7:6 Many of the exiles left the province of Babylon and returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own hometown. Their families had been living in exile in Babylonia ever since King Nebuchadnezzar had taken them there as prisoners.

Neh 7:7 Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

Neh 7:8 (8-25) This is the list of the clans of Israel, with the number of those from each clan who returned from exile:

- Parosh - 2,172
- Shephatiah - 372
- Arah - 652
- Pahath Moab (descendants of Jeshua and Joab) - 2,818
- Elam - 1,254
- Zattu - 845
- Zaccai - 760
- Binnui - 648
- Bebai - 628
- Azgad - 2,322
- Adonikam - 667
- Bigvai - 2,067
- Adin - 655

- Ater (also called Hezekiah) - 98
- Hashum - 328
- Bezai - 324
- Hariph - 112
- Gibeon - 95

Neh 7:26 (26-38) People whose ancestors had lived in the following towns also returned:

- Bethlehem and Netophah - 188
- Anathoth - 128
- Beth Azmaveth - 42
- Kiriath Jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth - 743
- Ramah and Geba - 621
- Michmash - 122
- Bethel and Ai - 123
- The other Nebo - 52
- The other Elam - 1,254
- Harim - 320
- Jericho - 345
- Lod, Hadid, and Ono - 721
- Senaah - 3,930

Neh 7:39 (39-42) This is the list of the priestly clans that returned from exile:

- Jedaiah (descendants of Jeshua) - 973
- Immer - 1,052
- Pashhur - 1,247
- Harim - 1,017

Neh 7:43 (43-45) Clans of Levites who returned from exile:

- Jeshua and Kadmiel (descendants of Hodaviah) - 74
- Temple musicians (descendants of Asaph) - 148
- Temple guards (descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai) - 138

Neh 7:46 (46-56) Clans of Temple workers who returned from exile: Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, Keros, Sia, Padon, Lebana, Hagaba, Shalmal, Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah, Besai, Meunim, Nephushesim, Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, Bazlith, Mehida, Harsha, Barkos, Sisera, Temah, Nezhiah, and Hatipha.

Neh 7:57 (57-59) Clans of Solomon's servants who returned from exile: Sotai, Sophereth, Perida, Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, Shephatiah, Hattil, Pochereth Hazzebaim, and Amon.

Neh 7:60 The total number of descendants of the Temple workers and of Solomon's servants who returned from exile was 392.

Neh 7:61 (61-62) There were 642 belonging to the clans of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda who returned from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer; but they could not prove that they were descendants of Israelites.

Neh 7:63 (63-64) The following priestly clans could find no record to prove their ancestry: Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai. (The ancestor of the priestly clan of Barzillai had married a woman from the clan of Barzillai of Gilead and taken the name of his father-in-law's clan.) Since they were unable to prove who their ancestors were, they were not accepted as priests.

Neh 7:65 The Jewish governor told them that they could not eat the food offered to God until there was a priest who could use the Urim and Thummim.

Totals of People and Gifts

Neh 7:66 (66-69)

- Total number of exiles who returned - 42,360
- Their male and female servants - 7,337
- Male and female musicians - 245
- Horses - 736
- Mules - 245
- Camels - 435
- Donkeys - 6,720

Neh 7:70 (70-72) Many of the people contributed to help pay the cost of restoring the Temple:

- The governor - 270 ounces of gold & 50 ceremonial bowls & 530 robes for priests
- Heads of clans - 337 pounds of gold & 3,215 pounds of silver
- The rest of the people - 337 pounds of gold & 2,923 pounds of silver & 67 robes for priests

Neh 7:73 The priests, the Levites, the Temple guards, the musicians, many of the ordinary people, the Temple workers—all the people of Israel—settled in the towns and cities of Judah.

Nehemiah 7:1-73

Nehemiah 7 – The Wall Guarded

A. Watchmen provided for the walls.

1. (1-2) The appointment of Hanani and Hananiah.

Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

a. **Then it was, when the wall was built:** Everything was in order – both practically (**the wall... I hung the doors... the gatekeepers**) and spiritually (**the singers... the Levites**); the work was completed and set right.

i. The singers and the Levites were there to lead the people in worship; the walls were not rebuilt so the people of Jerusalem could look at nice walls. They were rebuilt so they could worship God with greater glory and freedom than ever before.

ii. Every victory in our life should take us deeper into praise. If we are not praising God more, and more deeply, with each passing year, are we really having much victory? Maybe we are making it *through* tough times – but coming out more bitter and sour than ever. That is not God's victory. His victory leads to a sweeter spirit and to deeper praise.

b. **I gave the charge of Jerusalem:** Nehemiah wasn't in this for political glory. He had done a work, and now he could let it go. God would still use him in Jerusalem, but he knew it wasn't his place to stay in authority.

c. **Hanani:** This was Nehemiah's brother, was the one who first told him about the sad state of affairs in Jerusalem (Neh 1:2). His initiative and concern made him well qualified to govern.

d. **He was a faithful man and feared God more than many:** This described **Hananiah**, who was the co-leader of Jerusalem. This is what God needs in a man or a woman to use them greatly.

i. Many folks who aren't all that gifted – they can't sing, they can't remember a bunch of Bible verses, they don't have a knack for teaching, and so forth – can still be used greatly of God if they are faithful and

fear God. On the other hand, many terribly gifted people may always be frustrated in serving God if they are not faithful and fearing God.

3. (3) A watch set on the walls.

And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."

a. Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard: A tremendous victory had been won – the walls were rebuilt. Yet, the walls would not protect themselves. Diligent watchmen must be appointed, and the walls had to be guarded.

i. The gates were to be opened late and closed early – it was a time for high security.

b. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem: In the Christian life, often a victory is won and later lost because there was no guard. An enemy may come in because we are not watching. Walls can be climbed if there is no one there to stop the enemy, but an enemy is easily turned back from a wall by a guard.

B. List of the returned families.

1. (4-5) The need to develop Jerusalem.

Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt. Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return, and found written in it:

a. **The people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt:** Now that the walls were rebuilt, Nehemiah still wanted to see how he can be a blessing to the people of God and the city of God. He noticed that the population was low and there were many abandoned houses.

b. **Then God put it into my heart:** Nehemiah wanted Jerusalem to grow and prosper. But before that could happen he must first know who he had already. Just as when he toured the broken-down walls in 2:11-16, he needed to know the problem well. So, he took a census and looked at the registry first written by Ezra in Ezr 2:1-70.

2. (6-73) *The citizens of Jerusalem who returned from the Babylonian captivity.*

These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city. Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

The number of the men of the people of Israel: the sons of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two;

the sons of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two;

the sons of Arah, six hundred and fifty-two;

the sons of Pahath-Moab, of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and eighteen;

the sons of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four;

the sons of Zattu, eight hundred and forty-five;

**the sons of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty;
the sons of Binnui, six hundred and forty-eight;
the sons of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-eight;
the sons of Azgad, two thousand three hundred and twenty-two;
the sons of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-seven;
the sons of Bigvai, two thousand and sixty-seven;
the sons of Adin, six hundred and fifty-five;
the sons of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety-eight;
the sons of Hashum, three hundred and twenty-eight;
the sons of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-four;
the sons of Hariph, one hundred and twelve;
the sons of Gibeon, ninety-five;
the men of Bethlehem and Netophah, one hundred and eighty-eight;
the men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight;
the men of Beth Azmaveth, forty-two;
the men of Kirjath Jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three;
the men of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one;
the men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two;
the men of Bethel and Ai, one hundred and twenty-three;
the men of the other Nebo, fifty-two;
the sons of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four;
the sons of Harim, three hundred and twenty;
the sons of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five;
the sons of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-one;
the sons of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty.**

The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three;

**the sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two;
the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and
forty-seven;
the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.**

**The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, of Kadmiel,
and of the sons of Hodevah, seventy-four.**

**The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and
forty-eight.**

**The gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum,
the sons of Ater,
the sons of Talmon,
the sons of Akkub,
the sons of Hatita,
the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-eight.**

**The Nethinim: the sons of Ziha,
the sons of Hasupha,
the sons of Tabbaoth,
the sons of Keros,
the sons of Sia,
the sons of Padon,
the sons of Lebana,
the sons of Hagaba,
the sons of Salmai,
the sons of Hanan,
the sons of Giddel,
the sons of Gahar,
the sons of Reaiah,
the sons of Rezin,
the sons of Nekoda,
the sons of Gazzam,
the sons of Uzza,
the sons of Paseah,
the sons of Besai,
the sons of Meunim,**

**the sons of Nephishesim,
the sons of Bakbuk,
the sons of Hakupha,
the sons of Harhur,
the sons of Bazlith,
the sons of Mehida,
the sons of Harsha,
the sons of Barkos,
the sons of Sisera,
the sons of Tamah,
the sons of Neziah,
and the sons of Hatipha.**

**The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai,
the sons of Sophereth,
the sons of Perida,
the sons of Jaala,
the sons of Darkon,
the sons of Giddel,
the sons of Shephatiah,
the sons of Hattil,
the sons of Pochereth of Zebaim,
and the sons of Amon.**

**All the Nethinim, and the sons of Solomon's servants,
were three hundred and ninety-two.**

**And these were the ones who came up from Tel
Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer, but
they could not identify their father's house nor their
lineage, whether they were of Israel: the sons of
Delaiah,
the sons of Tobiah,
the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and forty-two;
and of the priests: the sons of Habaiah,
the sons of Koz,
the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters**

of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name.

These sought their listing *among* those who were registered by genealogy, but it was not found; therefore they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled. And the governor said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim.

Altogether the whole assembly *was* forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, besides their male and female servants, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred and forty-five men and women singers. Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, *their* camels four hundred and thirty-five, *and* donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

And some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priestly garments. Some of the heads of the fathers' *houses* gave to the treasury of the work twenty thousand gold drachmas, and two thousand two hundred silver minas. And that which the rest of the people gave *was* twenty thousand gold drachmas, two thousand silver minas, and sixty-seven priestly garments.

So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, *some* of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities. When the seventh month came, the children of Israel *were* in their cities.

a. **These are the people... who returned to Jerusalem and Judah:** This list was important because each of these people were important to God, in that they

did what so few of their fellow Jews did – they took the trouble to return back to the promised land after they had already set down roots for seventy years in the Babylonian empire.

i. These are people who had a pioneer spirit; they were willing to endure hardship and discomfort, because they had a call from God that was more important than their own comfort. Life was easier in Babylon, but it was better in Jerusalem!

b. **These are the people:** Since only about 2% of the Jews who were carried away into exile by the Babylonians came back, these one who did have the pioneer spirit are worthy of mention – and they are mentioned *twice* in God's eternal word (Here and in Ezra 2).

i. It would be wonderful to have your name in the Bible (at least in a positive light). Though that privilege is too late for us, God does have a *book of remembrance* (Mal 3:16), and surely the names of God's faithful pioneers will be in it.

ii. In this list several things were important.

- Each individual was important (specific names were mentioned).
- What families they came from was important (many family heads are named).
- Their gifts to support the work were important (they are specifically listed towards the end of the chapter).

c. **These sought their listing among those who were registered by genealogy, but it was not found:** Some could not be priests until their lineage was determined. In the Old Testament, one could not be a priest unless it was established that they descended from

Aaron, the brother of Moses, and the first high priest over Israel.

d. When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities: This list flows beautifully after the completion of the work, because it reminds us that the work was really all about these people.

i. The walls weren't all that important; what was important was the benefit the walls could have in the lives of God's people (enabling them to live in peace and security).

ii. The building work wasn't all that important; what was important was the benefit the building work had in the lives of God's people (teaching them to work hard, work together, work through adversity and attack, and work till the job is done).

Ezra Reads the Law

Neh 8:1 By the seventh month the people of Israel were all settled in their towns. On the first day of that month they all assembled in Jerusalem, in the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra, the priest and scholar of the Law which the LORD had given Israel through Moses, to get the book of the Law.

Neh 8:2 So Ezra brought it to the place where the people had gathered—men, women, and the children who were old enough to understand.

Neh 8:3 There in the square by the gate he read the Law to them from dawn until noon, and they all listened attentively.

Neh 8:4 Ezra was standing on a wooden platform that had been built for the occasion. The following men stood at his right: Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and the following stood at his left: Pedaiah,

Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

Neh 8:5 As Ezra stood there on the platform high above the people, they all kept their eyes fixed on him. As soon as he opened the book, they all stood up.

Neh 8:6 Ezra said, "Praise the LORD, the great God!" All the people raised their arms in the air and answered, "Amen! Amen!" They knelt in worship, with their faces to the ground.

Neh 8:7 Then they rose and stood in their places, and the following Levites explained the Law to them: Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah.

Neh 8:8 They gave an oral translation of God's Law and explained it so that the people could understand it.

This Day Is Holy

Neh 8:9 When the people heard what the Law required, they were so moved that they began to cry. So Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra, the priest and scholar of the Law, and the Levites who were explaining the Law told all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God, so you are not to mourn or cry.

Neh 8:10 Now go home and have a feast. Share your food and wine with those who don't have enough. Today is holy to our Lord, so don't be sad. The joy that the LORD gives you will make you strong."

Neh 8:11 The Levites went around calming the people and telling them not to be sad on such a holy day.

Neh 8:12 So all the people went home and ate and drank joyfully and shared what they had with others, because they understood what had been read to them.

Feast of Booths Celebrated

Neh 8:13 The next day the heads of the clans, together with the priests and the Levites, went to Ezra to study the teachings of the Law.

Neh 8:14 They discovered that the Law, which the LORD gave through Moses, ordered the people of Israel to live in temporary shelters during the Festival of Shelters.

Neh 8:15 So they gave the following instructions and sent them all through Jerusalem and the other cities and towns: "Go out to the hills and get branches from pines, olives, myrtles, palms, and other trees to make shelters according to the instructions written in the Law."

Neh 8:16 So the people got branches and built shelters on the flat roofs of their houses, in their yards, in the Temple courtyard, and in the public squares by the Water Gate and by the Ephraim Gate.

Neh 8:17 All the people who had come back from captivity built shelters and lived in them. This was the first time it had been done since the days of Joshua son of Nun, and everybody was excited and happy.

Neh 8:18 From the first day of the festival to the last they read a part of God's Law every day. They celebrated for seven days, and on the eighth day there was a closing ceremony, as required in the Law.

Nehemiah 8:1-18

Nehemiah 8 – The Spirit of God, Working through the Word of God, Brings Revival

J. Edwin Orr defined revival as: "The Spirit of God working through the Word of God, in the lives of the people of God." This chapter is a great example of this.

A. Hearing God's Word sparks revival.

1. (1-3) The people gather and ask Ezra to read God's Word.

Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* to the Book of the Law.

a. They told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the Law: This demonstrates that the Spirit of God was at work even before the reading of God's Word. People do not gather **together as one man** for the things of God unless the Spirit of God has moved them, and they do not desire God's Word unless the Spirit of God has moved them.

i. If you attend to the hearing of the Word of God, it is evidence the Spirit of God is working with you. But it is still important to cooperating with that work and to not resist it. We need to cooperate and flow with the work of God's Spirit if the Word of God is going to do its full work in us.

b. The book of the Law of Moses: This refers to the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). This was Israel's instruction manual for how to walk before God.

c. Ezra the scribe... Ezra the priest: Ezra was the man responsible for having the temple rebuilt, and for returning God's people to worship. Nehemiah, in all his work of rebuilding the walls, just carried on the work Ezra had begun.

i. We know Ezra cared about God's Word, because he was a **scribe** – someone who copied the Bible by hand. We know he was a man devoted to God Himself, because he was a godly **priest**.

d. **All who could hear with understanding:** This shows us *who* needed to hear the Word of God. Everyone who could understand it needed to hear it.

e. **Then he read from it in the open square:** Ezra read God's Word from daylight to mid-day. For some six hours he read God's Word and the people listened.

i. This was a move of the Spirit of God. People who will be **attentive to the Book of the Law** for some six hours are people touched by the Spirit of God.

ii. **From morning** is literally, "from the light." These people gathered from dawn to hear God's Word. They were willing to sacrifice something to hear it – they *wanted* it, and like Jacob they would not let go until they had their blessing.

2. (4-6) *How God's Word was received.*

So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

a. **So Ezra... stood on a platform:** They had taken the time to build a wooden platform, so the Word of God

could be heard. They did practical things, so God's Word would have the greatest effect.

i. There are practical things we can do also to help God's Word have the greatest effect; when a room is comfortable, low in distractions, and the preacher is clearly heard, it helps God's Word have the greatest effect.

ii. But by far, the greatest preparation must happen in the heart. We must come, willing to forget about ourselves and our own agenda, and submit ourselves to God's Word – not the preacher's word, but God's Word.

b. At his right hand... and at his left hand: On the right hand and left hand of Ezra were men who were supporting him in his ministry of teaching God's Word. The ministry of God's Word has the greatest effect when people can see men who are in support of it and obedience to it.

c. When he opened it, all the people stood up: They had a *respect* for God's Word. They recognized it for what it was – the Word of God, not the word of man. They honored it.

i. This is evidence of two things. First, that the Spirit of God is at work; second, that something good is going to happen.

d. Then all the people answered: This work of the Word of God and the Spirit of God had three immediate results.

- The people *thanked God* (by saying **Amen** when Ezra blessed the LORD).
- They prayed (by lifting up their hands).
- They worshipped (by bowing down before Him).

- i. Thanksgiving, prayer, and praise are all good measures of how the Spirit of God and Word of God are working in us.

3. (7-8) *God's Word is presented so the people may understand.*

Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.

a. **Helped the people to understand the Law:** Special men were appointed to help the people **understand** God's Word. After the reading they needed to understand it because if they did not understand it, it would do little good.

i. *Understanding* needs to be the first goal of any preacher or teacher. When I stand to teach God's people, there are some things that I always need to remember:

- If you leave knowing five helpful hints to a better life, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed.
- If you leave having been amused by humor, entertained by anecdotes, or captivated by dramatic stories, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed.
- If you leave motivated to action, or praying a prayer, but it is not based on a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed.
- If you leave admiring me, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed – and will

be accountable before God for my failure.

b. Helped the people to understand the Law: It is important to see why God's people need special help in understanding God's Word.

i. First, because the things of God are spiritually discerned and not intellectually discerned. The Holy Spirit uses gifted teachers to bring spiritual discernment to us, helping us to understand what God's Word says.

ii. Second, because it was first written in a different language, in a different culture, in a different place, and at a far distant time. Teachers help us understand it all in our own day.

iii. Third, because our minds are often slow to understand things that will convict our hearts. We often need it spelled right out to us.

iv. Understanding isn't only necessary for those who haven't become familiar with the Bible. Sometimes if we have heard it ten times before, we really don't understand it for right now. When an art restorer cleans a painting, he reveals things that were always there, but the colors weren't as bright, and the details weren't as clear, because they were obscured – then the real impact of the painter's work can be seen.

c. They read distinctly: The preacher must speak in a clear, easy-to-understand way. His main goal is to make the people understand, not to impress or entertain them.

d. They gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading: The preacher must communicate the sense of the passage of Scripture, and not his own agenda or favorite personal topics. The people must leave understanding God's Word better, not understanding the preacher's opinions better.

B. Response to God's Word prompts revival.

1. (9-11) *The people respond with weeping.*

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day *is* holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this* day *is* holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day *is* holy; do not be grieved."

a. **All the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law:** The Word of God was doing its intended work. 2Ti 3:16 tells us two things the Word of God is profitable for: *reproof* and *correction*. Sometimes it hurts to be reproved and corrected, and these tears were evidence of some of that pain.

b. **Do not mourn nor weep:** Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites did not want the people to mourn, even though it is a good thing to be sad under the conviction of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Yet if the sense of conviction is greater than the sense that God is doing a good and holy work, then tears are not good.

i. Our knowledge of our sin should never be bigger than our knowledge of Jesus as our savior. We are great sinners, but He is a greater savior.

ii. Therefore, *the joy of the Lord is your strength* – even when you are being convicted of sin. When we are convicted of sin we know that God is doing a work in us, so we can be glad and take joy.

c. **Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength:** The people *felt* sad, because they were aware of their own sin. But they could walk in *joy* because God was doing a great work. Our emotions are not beyond our control; we can do God's will even when we don't feel like it.

2. (12) *The people choose to rejoice.*

And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

a. **They understood the words that were declared to them:** They went away praising God, because understanding God's Word brings such a sweet sense of joy.

3. (13) *The leaders gather for more study of God's Word.*

Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

a. **The heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites:** Leaders have a special need to understand and walk in God's Word. Their ignorance or disobedience affects far more than themselves – it affects everyone they have and influence on.

4. (14-18) *The people keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and

branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as *it is written*.” Then the people went out and brought *them* and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day *there was* a sacred assembly, according to the *prescribed* manner.

a. **And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses:** This was beautiful, simple obedience. Their attitude was that God said it, so we will do it. Even though tradition did not tell them to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (it had not been done **since the days of Joshua**), but they relied on God’s Word, not on tradition.

b. **That the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month:** The Feast of Tabernacles was all about remembering how God had blessed and provided for Israel in the wilderness during the Exodus. They could see God’s blessing and provision for them right then, and it made something old seem brand new to them.

c. **And there was very great gladness:** Because of their great obedience to God’s Word, there was **very great gladness**. We often are deceived into thinking the path of gladness is in doing our own thing, but gladness and freedom come only through obedience.

d. Day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God: This revival began by the Spirit of God working through the Word of God; it continued that way also.

The People of Israel Confess Their Sin

Neh 9:1 (1-2) On the twenty-fourth day of the same month the people of Israel gathered to fast in order to show sorrow for their sins. They had already separated themselves from all foreigners. They wore sackcloth and put dust on their heads as signs of grief. Then they stood and began to confess the sins that they and their ancestors had committed.

Neh 9:3 For about three hours the Law of the LORD their God was read to them, and for the next three hours they confessed their sins and worshiped the LORD their God.

Neh 9:4 There was a platform for the Levites, and on it stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani. They prayed aloud to the LORD their God.

Neh 9:5 The following Levites gave a call to worship: Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah. They said: "Stand up and praise the LORD your God; praise him forever and ever! Let everyone praise his glorious name, although no human praise is great enough."

Neh 9:6 And then the people of Israel prayed this prayer: "You, LORD, you alone are LORD; you made the heavens and the stars of the sky. You made land and sea and everything in them; you gave life to all. The heavenly powers bow down and worship you.

Neh 9:7 You, LORD God, chose Abram and led him out of Ur in Babylonia; you changed his name to Abraham.

Neh 9:8 You found that he was faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him. You promised to give him the

land of the Canaanites, the land of the Hittites and the Amorites, the land of the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Girgashites, to be a land where his descendants would live. You kept your promise, because you are faithful.

Neh 9:9 "You saw how our ancestors suffered in Egypt; you heard their call for help at the Red Sea.

Neh 9:10 You worked amazing miracles against the king, against his officials and the people of his land, because you knew how they oppressed your people. You won then the fame you still have today.

Neh 9:11 Through the sea you made a path for your people and led them through on dry ground. Those who pursued them drowned in deep water, as a stone sinks in the raging sea.

Neh 9:12 With a cloud you led them in daytime, and at night you lighted their way with fire.

Neh 9:13 At Mount Sinai you came down from heaven; you spoke to your people and gave them good laws and sound teachings.

Neh 9:14 You taught them to keep your Sabbaths holy, and through your servant Moses you gave them your laws.

Neh 9:15 "When they were hungry, you gave them bread from heaven, and water from a rock when they were thirsty. You told them to take control of the land which you had promised to give them.

Neh 9:16 But our ancestors grew proud and stubborn and refused to obey your commands.

Neh 9:17 They refused to obey; they forgot all you did; they forgot the miracles you had performed. In their pride they chose a leader to take them back to slavery in Egypt. But you are a God who forgives; you are gracious and loving, slow to be angry. Your mercy is great; you did not forsake them.

Neh 9:18 They made an idol in the shape of a bull-calf and said it was the god who led them from Egypt! How much they insulted you, LORD!

Neh 9:19 But you did not abandon them there in the desert, for your mercy is great. You did not take away the cloud or the fire that showed them the path by day and night.

Neh 9:20 In your goodness you told them what they should do; you fed them manna and gave them water to drink.

Neh 9:21 Through forty years in the desert you provided all that they needed; their clothing never wore out, and their feet were not swollen with pain.

Neh 9:22 "You let them conquer nations and kingdoms, lands that bordered their own. They conquered the land of Heshbon, where Sihon ruled, and the land of Bashan, where Og was king.

Neh 9:23 You gave them as many children as there are stars in the sky, and let them conquer and live in the land that you had promised their ancestors to give them.

Neh 9:24 They conquered the land of Canaan; you overcame the people living there. You gave your people the power to do as they pleased with the people and kings of Canaan.

Neh 9:25 Your people captured fortified cities, fertile land, houses full of wealth, cisterns already dug, olive trees, fruit trees, and vineyards. They ate all they wanted and grew fat; they enjoyed all the good things you gave them.

Neh 9:26 "But your people rebelled and disobeyed you; they turned their backs on your Law. They killed the prophets who warned them, who told them to turn back to you. They insulted you time after time,

Neh 9:27 so you let their enemies conquer and rule them. In their trouble they called to you for help, and you

answered them from heaven. In your great mercy you sent them leaders who rescued them from their foes.

Neh 9:28 When peace returned, they sinned again, and again you let their enemies conquer them. Yet when they repented and asked you to save them, in heaven you heard, and time after time you rescued them in your great mercy.

Neh 9:29 You warned them to obey your teachings, but in pride they rejected your laws, although keeping your Law is the way to life. Hard-headed and stubborn, they refused to obey.

Neh 9:30 Year after year you patiently warned them. You inspired your prophets to speak, but your people were deaf, so you let them be conquered by other nations.

Neh 9:31 And yet, because your mercy is great, you did not forsake or destroy them. You are a gracious and merciful God!

Neh 9:32 "O God, our God, how great you are! How terrifying, how powerful! You faithfully keep your covenant promises. From the time when Assyrian kings oppressed us, even till now, how much we have suffered! Our kings, our leaders, our priests and prophets, our ancestors, and all our people have suffered. Remember how much we have suffered!

Neh 9:33 You have done right to punish us; you have been faithful, even though we have sinned.

Neh 9:34 Our ancestors, our kings, leaders, and priests have not kept your Law. They did not listen to your commands and warnings.

Neh 9:35 With your blessing, kings ruled your people when they lived in the broad, fertile land you gave them; but they failed to turn from sin and serve you.

Neh 9:36 And now we are slaves in the land that you gave us, this fertile land which gives us food.

Neh 9:37 What the land produces goes to the kings that you put over us because we sinned. They do as they please with us and our livestock, and we are in deep distress!"

Neh 9:38 Because of all that has happened, we, the people of Israel, hereby make a solemn written agreement, and our leaders, our Levites, and our priests put their seals to it.

Nehemiah 9:1-38

Nehemiah 9 – Israel Confesses Their Sin

A. A repentant nation gathers.

1. (1) An assembly of humble repentance.

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.

a. **The children of Israel were assembled:** After the wall was completed, after the wall was working, after the people had heard and obeyed God's Word, after the Holy Spirit was doing a significant work in the lives of people – now there is a scene of dramatic, humble repentance.

b. **Assembled with fasting:** Fasting showed their lowly, humble state. They considered themselves so poor before God that they had no food. They also wanted to say, "we are so troubled by our sin, food seems unimportant."

c. **In sackcloth:** This was wearing rough fabric, like a burlap bag. Again, this was to show their complete poverty of spirit before God. They also wanted to say, "we are so troubled by our sin, the normal comforts of life are unimportant."

d. **With dust on their heads:** This meant they took little handfuls of dirt and cast them on their heads. This was also to show their lowly state before God, and to say

"we are so troubled by our sin, the normal comforts of life are unimportant."

i. All of this reflects a humble attitude of heart – humble not only towards God, but also humble towards man. They did this publicly, and others would see them in this public state.

ii. Surely there were those among them who said, "I won't humiliate myself and join in." Others must have said, "I'll do it, just so others can see that I'm spiritual too." But there were many, if not most, who came to God with truly humble, repentant hearts.

2. (2) An assembly to separate themselves.

Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

a. **Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners:** Those who were of the pure line of Israel came forth to confess the sin of their nation; they confessed **their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.**

b. **Confessed their sins:** This was important. They had to realize and admit their missing of God's mark.

i. How do we sin? The English word *sin* comes from the idea "to miss the mark." In an archery tournament, if one did not hit the target in the right place, they would say they "sinned." A sin might miss the target by an inch, or it might miss it by ten feet – but it was still a sin either way. We sin when we do what God has told us not to do (telling us either in His Word, in our conscience, or through legitimate authority), or when we do *not* do what God has told to do (telling us in Word, conscience, or authority). Not all sin is the same, but all sin *is* sin.

c. **And the iniquities of their fathers:** This was also important, because they had to admit that not only they were sinners, but they came from sinful ancestors. This was especially important in Israel, where there was a tradition of glorifying their forefathers.

i. This does not mean there was some type of “generational curse” that had to be broken. God does not punish the children for their father’s sin, and it is *evil* to say He does (Ezekiel 18). We do recognize that those raised in an environment of sin may very well repeat those same sins, but not because they *must* – but because their environment made it an easy choice to make.

d. **They stood and confessed:** It should not seem strange that after such great victories, both with building and spiritually, that there was such humble repentance. This shows that repentance isn’t something we finish after coming to Jesus. It is something that grows as we grow closer to Jesus.

i. “Repentance grows as faith grows. Do not make any mistake about it; repentance is not a thing of days and weeks, a temporary penance to be got over as fast as possible! No it is the grace of a lifetime, like faith itself. Repentance is the inseparable companion of faith.” (Spurgeon)

ii. “How often the discovery of something new in the loveliness of the Lord Jesus has brought with it the discovery of some new corruption in our own hearts...God will never plant the seed of His life upon the soil of a hard, unbroken spirit. He will only plant that seed where the conviction of His Spirit has brought brokenness, where the soil has been watered with the tears of repentance as well as the tears of joy.” (Redpath)

iii. This great, humble gathering of God's people took place only two days after the end of the joyful celebration of the feast of tabernacles. They had drawn close to God, and now He is drawing them even closer!

3. (3) *An assembly to hear God's Word and to worship Him.*

And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God *for one-fourth* of the day; and *for another fourth* they confessed and worshipped the LORD their God.

a. **They stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law:** The humble repentance and confession of sin would have been an incomplete work if it were not for hearing the Word and worship. God does not show us our sin just so we will humbly confess it, but so that we can walk on in what is right before Him.

i. "In light of the previous chapter we may take it that the reading was no mere stream of words, but punctuated with explanatory comments and applications to the present situation." (Kidner).

b. **They confessed and worshipped the LORD their God:** This *brokenness of heart* has led them to humbly come before God and hear His Word. A sure first step of revival is this brokenness of heart.

B. The prayer of repentance.

1. (4-5a) *Those leading the congregation.*

Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, *and* Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God. And the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, *and* Pethahiah, said:

a. **Then Jeshua, Bani:** This mentions those Levites and leaders gathered to lead the people in their humble confession. It shouldn't surprise us, or make us feel like failures, if we must be led into confession and repentance.

b. **Stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice:** Obviously, all eight of these men did not pray the following prayer at the same time. Perhaps it was written out and they took turns, perhaps it was spontaneously prayed in succession, or perhaps (and according to tradition), Ezra prayed this prayer.

i. The following prayer is thought to be the longest prayer in the Bible – and yet takes only six and one-half minutes to say. Prayer does not need to be long to be glorious and effective.

2. *(5b-6) Praise to the God of all creation.*

“Stand up *and* bless the LORD your God

Forever and ever!

Blessed be Your glorious name,

Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!

You alone *are* the LORD;

You have made heaven,

The heaven of heavens, with all their host,

The earth and everything on it,

The seas and all that is in them,

And You preserve them all.

The host of heaven worships You.

a. **You have made heaven:** After the encouragement to praise, Ezra gave a reason to praise – because this is the great God who made it all. Looking at the glory of God's creation gives us a reason to praise Him, to humble ourselves before Him, and to trust Him.

b. **The host of heaven worships You:** God wants us to praise Him, to humble ourselves before Him, and to trust Him – but He gives us good reason to. We sometimes want our own reasons, but God gives us plenty of His own reasons.

3. (7-8) *Praise to the God who chose Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants.*

**"You are the LORD God,
Who chose Abram,
And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans,
And gave him the name Abraham;
You found his heart faithful before You,
And made a covenant with him
To give the land of the Canaanites,
The Hittites, the Amorites,
The Perizzites, the Jebusites,
And the Girgashites—
To give *it* to his descendants.
You have performed Your words,
For You *are* righteous.**

a. **You have performed Your words:** This says to God, "Lord, You promised this land to Abraham and his descendants, and now here we are! Your promise is indeed true."

4. (9-15) *Praise to the God who delivered Israel from Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness.*

**"You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt,
And heard their cry by the Red Sea.
You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh,
Against all his servants,
And against all the people of his land.
For You knew that they acted proudly against them.
So You made a name for Yourself, as *it is* this day.
And You divided the sea before them,**

**So that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land;
And their persecutors You threw into the deep,
As a stone into the mighty waters.
Moreover You led them by day with a cloudy pillar,
And by night with a pillar of fire,
To give them light on the road
Which they should travel.**

**“You came down also on Mount Sinai,
And spoke with them from heaven,
And gave them just ordinances and true laws,
Good statutes and commandments.
You made known to them Your holy Sabbath,
And commanded them precepts, statutes and laws,
By the hand of Moses Your servant.
You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger,
And brought them water out of the rock for their thirst,
And told them to go in to possess the land
Which You had sworn to give them.**

a. **You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt:** A second sure sign of revival (following brokenness of heart) is *reflection on the goodness of God*. When our pride is cast down, and our hearts humble before God, we can begin to see Him for who He is – and when we see that, we see how good God is.

5. (16-17a) The sinful response of man to God’s goodness.

**“But they and our fathers acted proudly,
Hardened their necks,
And did not heed Your commandments.
They refused to obey,
And they were not mindful of Your wonders
That You did among them.
But they hardened their necks,**

**And in their rebellion
They appointed a leader
To return to their bondage.**

a. **But they and our fathers:** This was a terrible response to the great and good works of God on behalf of Israel. God had been so good to Israel, **but they and our fathers acted proudly**. Our sin is bad enough; but to consider we sin against a God who has only treated us well is far, far, worse.

c. **Hardened their necks... refused to obey... were not mindful:** This is a third sure sign of revival – *recognition of our own sinfulness*. When we humbly seek God, and see His goodness, we can't help but next to notice our own sinfulness – the blackness of our sin stands out against the brightness of God's purity and goodness.

6. (17b-21) *God's gracious reply to rebellious Israel.*

**But You are God,
Ready to pardon,
Gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger,
Abundant in kindness,
And did not forsake them.**

**"Even when they made a molded calf for themselves,
And said, 'This *is* your god
That brought you up out of Egypt,'
And worked great provocations,
Yet in Your manifold mercies
You did not forsake them in the wilderness.
The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by
day,
To lead them on the road;
Nor the pillar of fire by night,
To show them light,**

**And the way they should go.
You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them,
And did not withhold Your manna from their mouth,
And gave them water for their thirst.
Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness,
They lacked nothing;
Their clothes did not wear out
And their feet did not swell.**

a. **But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them:** God's gracious answer to the rebellion of Israel was glorious. **Ready to pardon** is especially wonderful, indicating that there is nothing keeping God from pardoning us except our refusal to come to Him through Jesus. *He is ready to pardon*, if we are ready to receive it.

b. **Even when they made a molded calf for themselves:** This was God's gracious response to Israel – even after they made the golden calf and worshipped it, He still did not forsake them. He still provided the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, He still guided them by His spirit, He still fed them and gave them water. Together it all shows not how special Israel was, but how special God is.

c. **You sustained them in the wilderness:** We are often impressed at how patient God is with the sinner; how He somehow holds back His terrible judgment against those people who deserve it so badly. Yet it seems that His patience toward us is even greater, those who have received so much more from Him, but still act like Israel did.

i. "God's mercy with a sinner is only equaled and perhaps outmatched by His patience with the saints, with you and me." (Redpath)

7. (22-31) The cycle of Israel's relationship with God.

**"Moreover You gave them kingdoms and nations,
And divided them into districts.
So they took possession of the land of Sihon,
The land of the king of Heshbon,
And the land of Og king of Bashan.
You also multiplied their children as the stars of
heaven,
And brought them into the land
Which You had told their fathers
To go in and possess.
So the people went in
And possessed the land;
You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land,
The Canaanites,
And gave them into their hands,
With their kings
And the people of the land,
That they might do with them as they wished.
And they took strong cities and a rich land,
And possessed houses full of all goods,
Cisterns *already* dug, vineyards, olive groves,
And fruit trees in abundance.
So they ate and were filled and grew fat,
And delighted themselves in Your great goodness.
"Nevertheless they were disobedient
And rebelled against You,
Cast Your law behind their backs
And killed Your prophets, who testified against them
To turn them to Yourself;
And they worked great provocations.
Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their
enemies,
Who oppressed them;
And in the time of their trouble,**

**When they cried to You,
You heard from heaven;
And according to Your abundant mercies
You gave them deliverers who saved them
From the hand of their enemies.**

**“But after they had rest,
They again did evil before You.
Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies,
So that they had dominion over them;
Yet when they returned and cried out to You,
You heard from heaven;
And many times You delivered them according to
Your mercies,
And testified against them,
That You might bring them back to Your law.
Yet they acted proudly,
And did not heed Your commandments,
But sinned against Your judgments,
‘Which if a man does, he shall live by them.’
And they shrugged their shoulders,
Stiffened their necks,
And would not hear.
Yet for many years You had patience with them,
And testified against them by Your Spirit in Your
prophets.
Yet they would not listen;
Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples
of the lands.
Nevertheless in Your great mercy
You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them;
For You *are* God, gracious and merciful.**

**a. So they ate and were filled and grew fat, and
delighted themselves in Your great goodness:** The
cycle began with God showing His goodness to His people

(**You gave them kingdoms and nations**) and with God's people being blessed.

b. **Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You:** Then, in the time of comfort and abundance, God's people turn from Him.

c. **Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies:** Then, God brings correction – a “wake-up call” to His people.

d. **And in the time of their trouble... they cried out to You; and God delivers them: You heard from heaven... You gave them deliverers:** As a result, God's people then turn back to Him.

e. **But after they had rest, they again did evil before You:** Then, blessed and satisfied, God's people again turn from Him, and the cycle continues.

f. **Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and merciful:** As the cycle continues, the motions of each cycle get deeper and deeper – but God doesn't change.

i. We sometimes feel as if God has gotten tired of us; that we can't ask him to forgive us for something He has forgiven us for so many times before. But God never gets tired of us, and never turns away the repentant heart.

8. (32-37) *A plea to God for intervention.*

**“Now therefore, our God,
The great, the mighty, and awesome God,
Who keeps covenant and mercy:
Do not let all the trouble seem small before You
That has come upon us,
Our kings and our princes,
Our priests and our prophets,**

**Our fathers and on all Your people,
From the days of the kings of Assyria until this day.
However You *are* just in all that has befallen us;
For You have dealt faithfully,
But we have done wickedly.
Neither our kings nor our princes,
Our priests nor our fathers,
Have kept Your law,
Nor heeded Your commandments and Your
testimonies,
With which You testified against them.
For they have not served You in their kingdom,
Or in the many good *things* that You gave them,
Or in the large and rich land which You set before
them;
Nor did they turn from their wicked works.**

**"Here we *are*, servants today!
And the land that You gave to our fathers,
To eat its fruit and its bounty,
Here we *are*, servants in it!
And it yields much increase to the kings
You have set over us,
Because of our sins;
Also they have dominion over our bodies and our
cattle
At their pleasure;
And we *are* in great distress.**

a. The great, the mighty, and awesome God, Who keeps covenant and mercy: Because of who God is, and because of who they are (rebellious and wicked), they needed God to do the work of saving them from their enemies.

i. Israel, at this time, was not an independent nation – they were a province of the Empire of Persia and

were under heavy Persian taxes and obligations. They ask God to deliver them once again from this oppression!

b. **You are just in all that has befallen us:** This gives a good description of what real confession is all about. It recognizes that God is right and we are wrong (**but we have done wickedly**). Confession is agreeing with God about both things.

i. "It is a tremendous moment in a Christians' life when he can honestly look up into the face of God and say, 'Yes, Lord, You are right and I am wrong,' when he stops arguing with God, and drops his controversy. He says, 'Lord, yes. I've got what I deserved in this situation. You are right; I am wrong.' That is the thing for which God has been working in your life and mine from the very moment of our conversion." (Redpath)

9. (38) *Conclusion: a point of decision.*

And because of all this,

We make a sure covenant, and write it;

Our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it.

a. **We make a sure covenant:** Israel needed to come to this place, where knowing who God is, and knowing who they are, they come and make a *covenant* with God – even writing it down – to commit themselves to His ways.

b. **We make a sure covenant, and write it:** The fourth sure sign of revival – after brokenness of heart, after reflection on God's goodness, after recognition of our sinfulness, is *a renewal of our obedience*. We come to a place of decision, so this work of God is not just a wonderful experience, but something that shapes our future.

i. God's work in us often must come to a place of decision – where He wants us to make a stand for Him, and against some other things. If *you* need a point of decision, Alan Redpath gave these self-examination questions, to give an idea how:

What about my relationship with men?

Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am a better man than I really am? Is there the least suspicion of hypocrisy in my life? Am I honest in all my words and acts? Do I exaggerate?

Am I reliable? Can I be trusted? Do I confidentially pass on what was told to me in confidence? Do I grumble and complain in the church?

Am I jealous, impure, irritable, touchy, distrustful? Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying? Am I proud? Do I thank God I am not as other people? Is there anyone I fear, or dislike, or criticize, or resent? If so, what am I doing about it?

What about my devotion to God?

Does the Bible live to me? Do I give it time to speak to me? Do I go to bed in time and do I get up in time?

Am I enjoying my prayer life today? Did I enjoy it this morning? When I am involved in a problem in life, do I talk about it or pray about it?

Am I disobeying God in anything, or insisting upon doing something about which my conscience is very uneasy?

When did I last speak to someone else with the object of trying to win him for Christ?

Am I a slave to books, dress, friends, work, or what others think? How do I spend my spare time?

The People Who Sealed the Covenant

Neh 10:1 The first to sign was the governor, Nehemiah son of Hacaliah, and then Zedekiah signed. The following also signed:

Neh 10:2 (2-8) Priests: Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaia.

Neh 10:9 (9-13) Levites: Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the clan of Henadad, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

Neh 10:14 (14-27) Leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

The Obligations of the Covenant

Neh 10:28 We, the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the Temple guards, the Temple musicians, the Temple workers, and all others who in obedience to God's Law have separated themselves from the foreigners living in our land, we, together with our wives and all our children old enough to understand,

Neh 10:29 do hereby join with our leaders in an oath, under penalty of a curse if we break it, that we will live according to God's Law, which God gave through his servant Moses; that we will obey all that the LORD, our Lord, commands us; and that we will keep all his laws and requirements.

Neh 10:30 We will not intermarry with the foreigners living in our land.

Neh 10:31 If foreigners bring grain or anything else to sell to us on the Sabbath or on any other holy day, we will not buy from them. Every seventh year we will not farm the land, and we will cancel all debts.

Neh 10:32 Every year we will each contribute one-eighth of an ounce of silver to help pay the expenses of the Temple.

Neh 10:33 We will provide for the Temple worship the following: the sacred bread, the daily grain offering, the animals to be burned each day as sacrifices, the sacred offerings for Sabbaths, New Moon Festivals, and other festivals, the other sacred offerings, the offerings to take away the sins of Israel, and anything else needed for the Temple.

Neh 10:34 We, the people, priests, and Levites, will draw lots each year to determine which clans are to provide wood to burn the sacrifices offered to the LORD our God, according to the requirements of the Law.

Neh 10:35 We will take to the Temple each year an offering of the first grain we harvest and of the first fruit that ripens on our trees.

Neh 10:36 The first son born to each of us we will take to the priests in the Temple and there, as required by the Law, dedicate him to God. We will also dedicate the first calf born to each of our cows, and the first lamb or kid born to each of our sheep or goats.

Neh 10:37 We will take to the priests in the Temple the dough made from the first grain harvested each year and our other offerings of wine, olive oil, and all kinds of fruit. We will take to the Levites, who collect tithes in our farming villages, the tithes from the crops that grow on our land.

Neh 10:38 Priests who are descended from Aaron are to be with the Levites when tithes are collected, and for use in the

Temple the Levites are to take to the Temple storerooms one-tenth of all the tithes they collect.

Neh 10:39 The people of Israel and the Levites are to take the contributions of grain, wine, and olive oil to the storerooms where the utensils for the Temple are kept and where the priests who are on duty, the Temple guards, and the members of the Temple choir have their quarters. We will not neglect the house of our God.

Nehemiah 10:1-39

Nehemiah 10 – Israel’s Covenant with God

A. Roster of those who signed the covenant.

1. (1-8) Nehemiah and the priests signed the covenant.

Now those who placed *their* seal on *the* document were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah, Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. These were the priests.

a. **Those who placed their seal on the document:** At the end of Nehemiah chapter 9, the people had come to a place of decision, and now, collectively, the nation was going to do something about it by entering into a covenant.

i. Neh 9:38 gives the sense of this: *And because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it; and our leaders and our Levites and our priests shall seal it.*

ii. In Neh 9:38, *make a covenant* is literally “cut a covenant”; covenants were not made in the ancient world, they were *cut* – because almost always an animal was sacrificed as part of the covenant. A

covenant always cost something, and our point of decision will cost us something – the self-life, comfort, ease, some of the passing pleasures of this world. Count the cost to see if it's worth it!

b. Those who placed their seal on the document: It was wonderful for the nation as a whole to feel that something had to be done about the sin problem among them. But it was meaningless unless individuals came forth to say, "we will do something about this." Here are the leaders (84 in all) willing to put their name on the line for the covenant before God.

c. On the document: These people in Nehemiah's day knew the customs of making covenants, and they knew how important covenants were to God. They remembered God made a covenant with Abraham, promising that both a nation and the Messiah would descend from him; God made a covenant with Moses and the nation of Israel when He gave them the law at Mount Sinai; God made a covenant with King David, promising the Messiah would come from his family. But the greatest covenant, the New Covenant instituted by the Messiah, was yet to come.

2. (9-13) The Levites who signed the covenant.

The Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, and Kadmiel. Their brethren: Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Bani, and Beninu.

3. (14-27) The civic leaders who signed the covenant.

The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpiash, Meshullam,

Hezir, Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, Ahijah, Hanan, Anan, Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

B. The terms of the covenant.

1. (28-29) The making of the covenant with God.

Now the rest of the people; the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding; these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes:

a. **Now the rest of the people:** The 84 mentioned previously sealed the covenant, but **the rest of the people** – that is, **everyone who had knowledge and understanding** – also made the covenant with God.

b. **Entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law:** In making the covenant, they agreed to accept a curse from God if they did not obey His law. They accepted the curse as a form of His correction, to bring them back to obedience.

i. Many of us have done a similar thing. We probably didn't pray "God, curse me if I disobey You." But many of us have prayed, "Lord, whatever it takes I want to follow You. Whatever it takes I want to be Your man." That is essentially praying the same thing, and that is a good prayer.

c. Their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding:

They made this covenant publicly; though its most significant meaning was between the individual and God, it was also important that other people be witness to the covenant. A public covenant meant accountability.

2. (30) Their first area of decision: we will be faithful to God when it comes to our romantic relationships.

We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons;

a. We would not give our daughters as wives to the people of the land: This promise was addressed to parents. This is because in that day, *parents* made the marriage decisions, not the people getting married.

i. If this covenant were to be repeated today, it wouldn't be focused towards the parents, but towards the individuals who wanted to get married.

b. We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land: This preserved the important principle that a follower of God should only marry another similarly committed follower of God. It is obvious by experience and observation that it is important to carefully and prayerfully choose your spouse.

i. Many of us have remarkable stories of how we came together with our mate – some stories are romantic, and others are kind of strange. Once we are together, God wants to make that marriage something special before Him, and desires to draw the couple closer together as they draw closer to God, as the sides of a triangle come closer as they come higher up.

ii. But if one is not now married, it is important for them to make the same kind of covenant. If one has given their life to serving Jesus Christ, there will be difficulty if they marry someone who has given their life to something else. If one is in that situation now, God can do great things, but one should never knowingly choose to be in that place from the beginning.

iii. The whole idea of marriage is closely connected to the idea of *covenant*. Mal 2:14 says, *Yet she is your companion, and your wife by covenant*. Marriage is a covenant, between the husband and wife, between them and all family and witness, but most importantly, between them and God.

iv. When we understand marriage as a covenant, we have something to bond us together that is *stronger* than society's expectations, *more constant* than romantic love, and *more certain* than happy times – we have a covenant.

3. (31) *Second area of decision: we will be faithful to God when it comes to doing business.*

If the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's produce and the exacting of every debt.

a. ***If the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day:*** Under the Old Testament law, God said that no one could buy or sell anything on the Sabbath day. These citizens of Jerusalem had been breaking this law, and they now covenant with God to obey it.

b. We would not buy it from them on the Sabbath:

The motive for breaking this law was clear. They could make more money selling on seven days of the week instead of six days. This was a covenant to only make money in ways that were obedient and glorifying to God.

i. This is a great challenge for the church today, when many are in careers where they have the opportunity to make money in ways that are plain wrong. We need to have the same heart they had here, and covenant before God to only make money in ways that are obedient and glorifying to Him.

ii. Many of us – as was true in Nehemiah’s day – slip into these practices subtly. We don’t wake up in the morning saying we’re going to cut corners, cheat others, and defraud the system. We do it because we think we *need* to – bills need to be paid, the kids need things, and so on. Then we do it because it *works*. But we don’t really need to; if we trust God, He will take care of us. We should never trust our slick ways of doing business more than we trust God in heaven.

4. (32-39) The third area of decision: we will be faithful to God when it comes to supporting God’s work.

Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, for the regular grain offering, for the regular burnt offering of the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the set feasts; for the holy things, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. We cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for *bringing* the wood offering into the house of our God, according to our fathers’ houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God as *it is* written in the

Law. And we made ordinances to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the LORD; to bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle, as *it is* written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks, to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God; to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, *the* new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities. And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary *are, where* the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers *are*; and we will not neglect the house of our God.

a. To exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: They laid down a yearly tax to support the workings of the temple. They required people to bring wood to the temple on a rotating basis. They committed themselves to obey the command to bring the firstborn and the firstfruits, and the tithe (ten percent of the produce of their land) unto the house of God.

i. They simply did two things. First, they agreed to give as God had commanded (the firstborn, firstfruits, and the tithe). Second, they agreed to give as the special need required (the one-third of a shekel tax and the wood).

ii. Firstborn and firstfruits were risky ways to give, because your land might not yield much more produce, and your cow or ewe might not give birth again – yet the first still belonged to God and was given to the priests. God promised to bless this giving of the firstfruits and firstborn in faith: *Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.* (Pro 3:9-10).

b. **We will not neglect the house of our God:** If before they covenanted to make money only in ways that would glorify God, here they covenant to spend their money in ways that glorify God – and beginning it all with giving unto the Lord.

c. **We will not neglect the house of our God:** Simply said, the Bible says we need to be givers. Not so much for the sake of those we give to, but because giving sets our heart right about material things. God Himself is the greatest giver.

i. If you hold on to money so tightly that you will not be a giver, then you have revealed where your heart is when it comes to money.

ii. The New Testament speaks with great clarity on the principle of giving; that giving should be regular, planned, proportional, and private (1Co 16:1-4); that it must be generous, freely given, and cheerful (2 Corinthians 9).

iii. If you are reluctant to be a giver as the Bible says you should, simply talk to those who are. Ask them if it has been a blessing or a curse in their life to give as God says to. God promises He will never owe us anything, and we cannot out-give God – though the return is often far better than dollars and cents.

The Leaders in Jerusalem

Neh 11:1 The leaders settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people drew lots to choose one family out of every ten to go and live in the holy city of Jerusalem, while the rest were to live in the other cities and towns.

Neh 11:2 The people praised anyone else who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

Neh 11:3 In the other towns and cities the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the Temple workers, and the descendants of Solomon's servants lived on their own property in their own towns. The following is the list of the leading citizens of the province of Judah who lived in Jerusalem:

Neh 11:4 *Members of the tribe of Judah:* Athaiah, the son of Uzziah and grandson of Zechariah. His other ancestors included Amariah, Shephatiah, and Mahalalel, descendants of Judah's son Perez.

Neh 11:5 Maaseiah, the son of Baruch and grandson of Colhozeh. His other ancestors included Hazaiah, Adaiah, Joiarib, and Zechariah, descendants of Judah's son Shelah.

Neh 11:6 Of the descendants of Perez, 468 outstanding soldiers lived in Jerusalem.

Neh 11:7 *Members of the tribe of Benjamin:* Sallu, the son of Meshullam and grandson of Joed. His other ancestors included Pedaiah, Kolaiah, Maaseiah, Ithiel, and Jeshaiiah.

Neh 11:8 Gabbai and Sallai, close relatives of Sallu. In all, 928 Benjaminites lived in Jerusalem.

Neh 11:9 Joel son of Zichri was their leader, and Judah son of Hassenuah was the second ranking official in the city.

Neh 11:10 *Priests:* Jedaiah son of Joiarib, and Jachin.

Neh 11:11 Seraiah, the son of Hilkiah and grandson of Meshullam. His ancestors included Zadok, Meraioth, and Ahitub, who was the High Priest.

Neh 11:12 In all, 822 members of this clan served in the Temple. Adaiah, the son of Jeroham and grandson of Pelaliah. His ancestors included Amzi, Zechariah, Pashhur, and Malchijah.

Neh 11:13 In all, 242 members of this clan were heads of families. Amashsai, the son of Azarel and grandson of Ahzai. His ancestors included Meshillemoth and Immer.

Neh 11:14 There were 128 members of this clan who were outstanding soldiers. Their leader was Zabdiel, a member of a leading family.

Neh 11:15 *Levites*: Shemaiah, the son of Hasshub and grandson of Azrikam. His ancestors included Hashabiah and Bunni.

Neh 11:16 Shabbethai and Jozabad, prominent Levites in charge of the work outside the Temple.

Neh 11:17 Mattaniah, the son of Mica and grandson of Zabdi, a descendant of Asaph. He led the Temple choir in singing the prayer of thanksgiving. Bakbukiah, who was Mattaniah's assistant. Abda, the son of Shammua and grandson of Galal, a descendant of Jeduthun.

Neh 11:18 In all, 284 Levites lived in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Neh 11:19 *Temple guards*: Akkub, Talmon, and their relatives, 172 in all.

Neh 11:20 The rest of the people of Israel and the remaining priests and Levites lived on their own property in the other cities and towns of Judah.

Neh 11:21 The Temple workers lived in the part of Jerusalem called Ophel and worked under the supervision of Ziha and Gishpa.

Neh 11:22 The supervisor of the Levites who lived in Jerusalem was Uzzi, the son of Bani and grandson of Hashabiah. His ancestors included Mattaniah and Mica, and

he belonged to the clan of Asaph, the clan that was responsible for the music in the Temple services.

Neh 11:23 There were royal regulations stating how the clans should take turns in leading the Temple music each day.

Neh 11:24 Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, of the clan of Zerah and the tribe of Judah, represented the people of Israel at the Persian court.

Villages Outside Jerusalem

Neh 11:25 Many of the people lived in towns near their farms. Those who were of the tribe of Judah lived in Kiriath Arba, Dibon, and Jekabzeel, and in the villages near these cities.

Neh 11:26 They also lived in the cities of Jeshua, Moladah, Bethpelet,

Neh 11:27 and Hazarshual, and in Beersheba and the villages around it.

Neh 11:28 They lived in the city of Ziklag, in Meconah and its villages,

Neh 11:29 in Enrimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth,

Neh 11:30 in Zanoah, in Adullam, and in the villages near these towns. They lived in Lachish and on the farms nearby, and in Azekah and its villages. That is to say, the people of Judah lived in the territory between Beersheba in the south and Hinnom Valley in the north.

Neh 11:31 The people of the tribe of Benjamin lived in Geba, Michmash, Ai, Bethel and the nearby villages,

Neh 11:32 Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah,

Neh 11:33 Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim,

Neh 11:34 Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat,

Neh 11:35 Lod, and Ono, and in Craftsmen's Valley.

Neh 11:36 Some groups of Levites that had lived in the territory of Judah were assigned to live with the people of

Benjamin.

Nehemiah 11:1-36

Nehemiah 11 – The Citizens of Jerusalem

A. Recruiting citizens of Jerusalem.

1. (1) Those who will live in Jerusalem.

Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths were to dwell in other cities.

a. **To bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem:** It wasn't enough to see the city walls rebuilt and the spiritual renewal of the people of Jerusalem; now they concerned themselves with getting more people into the city.

i. For a city to prosper and be great, it must be populated. And for more than seventy years, Jerusalem had been nothing but a ghost town. Now, over the last eighty or so years, it has been repopulated, with a new temple built (under Ezra) and the walls rebuilt (under Nehemiah). But the city still needed more people.

ii. Nehemiah also knew the bigger the population of Jerusalem, the greater the resources for defense and strength in battle. He didn't rebuild the walls just to see some conquering army come and break them down again!

b. **Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem:** It was good that the **leaders of the people** set the example by living in Jerusalem. Leaders must set the pattern by their lives. They had no right to expect the people to live in Jerusalem if they themselves were not living there.

c. **One out of ten:** The rest of the people submitted themselves to a lottery system, where one out of ten would be selected to move from the surrounding regions into the city of Jerusalem. So, in the end, at least ten percent of Judah's population would live in Jerusalem.

2. (2) *Blessing the citizens of Jerusalem.*

And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.

a. **And the people blessed all the men:** Apart from the leaders (who had a special obligation) and those selected in the lottery (who were also obligated), there were **all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.** These men had a special blessing.

i. They had a unique pioneer spirit. They had the ability to endure some measure of hardship or discomfort to accomplish a greater work for God's kingdom.

ii. It was in these days in the rebuilding of Jerusalem that God asked an important question through the prophet Zechariah: *For who has despised the day of small things? (Zec 4:10).* The answer is, "Many of us have!" But these who offered themselves to **willingly** live at Jerusalem, so as to take what is small and build it up before the Lord, have decided to not despise the day of small things.

b. **To dwell at Jerusalem:** If such a blessing is reserved for those who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem, there was something special about the challenge of living in Jerusalem.

i. To live in Jerusalem, you had to re-order your view of material things. You had to give up land in your

previous region and take up some kind of new business in Jerusalem.

ii. To live in Jerusalem, you had to re-arrange your social priorities, certainly leaving some friends and family behind in your old village.

iii. To live in Jerusalem, you had to have a mind to endure the problems in the city. It had been a ghost town for 70 years, and was now basically a slightly rebuilt, somewhat repopulated ghost town. The city didn't look all that glorious and it needed work.

iv. To live in Jerusalem, you had to live knowing you were a target for the enemy. There were strong walls to protect you, but since Jerusalem was now a notable city with rebuilt walls, the fear was more from whole armies than bands of robbers. The old village was nice, but not in much danger from great armies.

v. The Bible tells us there is a city coming down from heaven to earth, when God is done with this earth as we know it, and it calls that city *New Jerusalem* (Rev 21:2). People don't want to be citizens of the New Jerusalem for the same reasons many didn't want to be citizens of Nehemiah's Jerusalem.

B. Roster of those living in Jerusalem and in Judea.

1. (3-24) Leaders who lived in Jerusalem.

These *are* the heads of the province who dwelt in Jerusalem. (But in the cities of Judah everyone dwelt in his own possession in their cities; Israelites, priests, Levites, Nethinim, and descendants of Solomon's servants.) Also in Jerusalem dwelt *some* of the children of Judah and of the children of Benjamin. The children of Judah: Athaiah the son of Uziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, of the children of

Perez; and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Col-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni. All the sons of Perez who dwelt at Jerusalem *were* four hundred and sixty-eight valiant men. And these are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah; and after him Gabbai *and* Sallai, nine hundred and twenty-eight. Joel the son of Zichri *was* their overseer, and Judah the son of Senuah *was* second over the city. Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, and Jachin; Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, *was* the leader of the house of God. Their brethren who did the work of the house *were* eight hundred and twenty-two; and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah, and his brethren, heads of the fathers' *houses*, *were* two hundred and forty-two; and Amashai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, and their brethren, mighty men of valor, *were* one hundred and twenty-eight. Their overseer *was* Zabdiel the son of *one of* the great men. Also of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the heads of the Levites, *had* the oversight of the business outside of the house of God; Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, the leader *who* began the thanksgiving with prayer; Bakbukiah, the second among his brethren; and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. All the Levites in the holy city *were* two hundred and eighty-four. Moreover the gatekeepers,

Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren who kept the gates, were one hundred and seventy-two. And the rest of Israel, of the priests *and* Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, everyone in his inheritance. But the Nethinim dwelt in Ophel. And Ziha and Gishpa were over the Nethinim. Also the overseer of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha, of the sons of Asaph, the singers in charge of the service of the house of God. For *it was* the king's command concerning them that a certain portion should be for the singers, a quota day by day. Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, was the king's deputy in all matters concerning the people.

a. **These are the heads of the province:** This extensive list includes tribal leaders (of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin), military men, priests, Levites, gatekeepers, and civil and royal servants.

b. **Who dwelt in Jerusalem:** All these notable men and their families took the lead by choosing to settle in Jerusalem, setting a good example for all God's people.

2. (25-36) Jewish villages and towns throughout Judea.

And as for the villages with their fields, *some* of the children of Judah dwelt in Kirjath Arba and its villages, Dibon and its villages, Jekabzeel and its villages; in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth Pelet, Hazar Shual, and Beersheba and its villages; in Ziklag and Meconah and its villages; in En Rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages; in Lachish and its fields; in Azekah and its villages. They dwelt from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom. Also the children of Benjamin from Geba *dwelt* in Michmash, Aiija, and Bethel, and their villages; in Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah;

in Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim; in Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat; in Lod, Ono, and the Valley of Craftsmen. Some of the Judean divisions of Levites were in Benjamin.

Priests and Levites

Neh 12:1 The following is a list of the priests and Levites who returned from exile with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and with the High Priest Joshua:

Neh 12:2 (2-7) Priests: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, and Jedaiah. These men were leaders among all their fellow priests in the days of Joshua.

Neh 12:8 *Levites*: The following were in charge of the singing of hymns of thanksgiving: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah.

Neh 12:9 The following formed the choir that sang the responses: Bakbukiah, Unno, and their fellow Levites.

Neh 12:10 Joshua was the father of Joiakim; Joiakim was the father of Eliashib; Eliashib was the father of Joiada;

Neh 12:11 Joiada was the father of Jonathan; and Jonathan was the father of Jaddua.

Neh 12:12 (12-21) When Joiakim was High Priest, the following priests were the heads of the priestly clans:

Priest	Clan
Meraiah	Seraiah
Hananiah	Jeremiah
Meshullam	Ezra
Jehohanan	Amariah
Jonathan	Malluchi
Joseph	Shebaniah
Adna	Harim
Helkai	Meraioth

Zechariah	Iddo
Meshullam	Ginnethon
Zichri	Abijah
...	Miniamin
Piltai	Moadiah
Shammua	Bilgah
Jehonathan	Shemaiah
Mattenai	Joiarib
Uzzi	Jedaiah
Kallai	Sallai
Eber	Amok
Hashabiah	Hilkiah
Nethanel	Jedaiah

Neh 12:22 A record was kept of the heads of the Levite families and of the priestly families during the lifetimes of the following High Priests: Eliashib, Joiada, Jonathan, and Jaddua. This record was finished when Darius was emperor of Persia.

Neh 12:23 The heads of the Levite families, however, were recorded in the official records only until the time of Jonathan, the grandson of Eliashib.

Neh 12:24 Under the direction of Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua, Binnui, and Kadmiel, the Levites were organized into groups. Two groups at a time praised God responsively and gave thanks to him, in accordance with the instructions given by King David, the man of God.

Neh 12:25 The following Temple guards were in charge of guarding the storerooms by the gates to the Temple: Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub.

Neh 12:26 These people lived during the time of Joiakim, the son of Joshua and grandson of Jehozadak, and the time

of Nehemiah the governor, and the time of Ezra, the priest who was a scholar of the Law.

Dedication of the Wall

Neh 12:27 When the city wall of Jerusalem was dedicated, the Levites were brought in from wherever they were living, so that they could join in celebrating the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals and harps.

Neh 12:28 The Levite families of singers gathered from the area where they had settled around Jerusalem and from the towns around Netophah,

Neh 12:29 and from Bethgilgal, Geba, and Azmaveth.

Neh 12:30 The priests and the Levites performed ritual purification for themselves, the people, the gates, and the city wall.

Neh 12:31 I assembled the leaders of Judah on top of the wall and put them in charge of two large groups to march around the city, giving thanks to God. The first group went to the right on top of the wall toward the Rubbish Gate.

Neh 12:32 Hoshaiah marched behind the singers, followed by half the leaders of Judah.

Neh 12:33 (33-35) The following priests, blowing trumpets, marched next: Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah. Next came Zechariah, the son of Jonathan and grandson of Shemaiah. (His ancestors also included Mattaniah, Micaiah, and Zaccur, of the clan of Asaph.)

Neh 12:36 He was followed by other members of his clan—Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani—all of whom carried musical instruments of the kind played by King David, the man of God. Ezra the scholar led this group in the procession.

Neh 12:37 At the Fountain Gate they went up the steps that led to David's City, past David's palace, and back to the wall at the Water Gate, on the east side of the city.

Neh 12:38 The other group of those who gave thanks went to the left along the top of the wall, and I followed with half of the people. We marched past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall,

Neh 12:39 and from there we went past Ephraim Gate, Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate. We ended our march near the gate to the Temple.

Neh 12:40 So both the groups that were giving thanks to God reached the Temple area. In addition to the leaders who were with me,

Neh 12:41 my group included the following priests, blowing trumpets: Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah;

Neh 12:42 and they were followed by Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. The singers, led by Jezrahiah, sang at the top of their voices.

Neh 12:43 That day many sacrifices were offered, and the people were full of joy because God had made them very happy. The women and the children joined in the celebration, and the noise they all made could be heard for miles.

Service at the Temple

Neh 12:44 At that time men were put in charge of the storerooms where contributions for the Temple were kept, including the tithes and the first grain and fruit that ripened each year. These men were responsible for collecting from the farms near the various cities the contributions for the priests and the Levites which the Law required. All the people of Judah were pleased with the priests and the Levites,

Neh 12:45 because they performed the ceremonies of purification and the other rituals that God had commanded. The Temple musicians and the Temple guards also performed their duties in accordance with the regulations made by King David and his son Solomon.

Neh 12:46 From the time of King David and the musician Asaph long ago, the musicians have led songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Neh 12:47 In the time of Zerubbabel and also in the time of Nehemiah, all the people of Israel gave daily gifts for the support of the Temple musicians and the Temple guards. The people gave a sacred offering to the Levites, and the Levites gave the required portion to the priests.

Nehemiah 12:1-47

Nehemiah 12 – Dedication of the Wall

A. Priestly and Levitical families.

1. (1-11) Priests and Levites in the days of Zerubbabel, the high priest.

Now these *are* the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, *and* Jedaiah. These *were* the heads of the priests and their brethren in the days of Jeshua. Moreover the Levites *were* Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, *and* Mattaniah *who led* the thanksgiving *psalms*, he and his brethren. Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brethren, *stood* across from them in *their* duties. Jeshua begot Joiakim, Joiakim begot Eliashib, Eliashib begot Joiada, Joiada begot Jonathan, and Jonathan begot Jaddua.

2. (12-21) *Priests in the days of Joiakim.*

Now in the days of Joiakim, the priests, the heads of the fathers' houses were: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; of Melichu, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; of Abijah, Zichri; *the son* of Minjamin; of Moadiah, Piltai; of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; *and* of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

3. (22-26) Levites during the reign of Darius the Persian.

During the reign of Darius the Persian, a record *was also kept* of the Levites and priests *who had been* heads of their fathers' houses in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua. The sons of Levi, the heads of the fathers' houses until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib, *were* written in the book of the chronicles. And the heads of the Levites *were* Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers across from them, to praise *and* give thanks, group alternating with group, according to the command of David the man of God. Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub *were* gatekeepers keeping the watch at the storerooms of the gates. These *lived* in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe.

B. The dedication ceremony.

1. (27-29) *Gathering the Levites for the dedication ceremony.*

Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, *with* cymbals and stringed instruments and harps. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the countryside around Jerusalem, from the villages of the Netophathites, from the house of Gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built themselves villages all around Jerusalem.

a. The sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem: The Levites had many responsibilities in the life and worship of Israel, but one of the most important jobs they had was to lead the people in songs of worship and praise to God.

b. To celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing: Mostly, they did not sing without musical instruments. Here are specifically mentioned **cymbals and stringed instruments and harps**.

i. There are at least twenty-two different musical instruments mentioned in the Bible, including the harp, the lyre (an ancient guitar), horns, trumpets, flutes, tambourines, drums, cymbals, and bells.

ii. The Levites were specially appointed to use these instruments to lead the people in worshipping God through singing.

c. Sons of the singers... the singers had built themselves villages: There were also specially appointed singers. The singers in Nehemiah's day had a close-knit bond, both by families and living arrangements.

i. Since the job of these singers was to lead the people in worship of God, they had to be good singers; but more importantly, they had to be people of worship themselves.

ii. There is a huge difference between being a great singer and being a great leader of songs of worship to God. Worship should be excellent, but it isn't entertainment. The goal isn't to give the people a good feeling (though that may happen), but to give glory and honor to God.

2. (30) Purification.

Then the priests and Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

a. **Then the priests and Levites purified themselves:** They did this *first*. They could not effectively lead the people in worship of God unless they walked in purity before the Lord.

b. **And purified the people:** The next did this. They brought cleansing to the people the way the Bible said to, knowing that only a purified people could really worship and praise God.

i. Some might silently object here; they may say, "I know a person who goes to church and seems to be lost in beautiful praise and worship to God, and I also know their life is rather impure outside the church walls. It sure seems they are worshipping God, but are personally impure."

ii. Something is wrong there; probably, their worship is not a true worship of God in spirit and in truth, but instead a "soulish" experience. All that inwardly moves a person in a deep way is not necessarily of the spirit; it can be of the soul. One of the great works of the Word of God is to divide between that

which is truly spiritual and that which is merely soulish (Heb 4:12).

iii. Without purity, we can't worship God in spirit and in truth, as Jesus commanded us to (Joh 4:24). Psa 24:3-4 asks, *Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart*, and it means it in the sense of bringing praise to God.

iv. We can be made pure and clean before God today, right now, by doing what the Bible says to do – not in following an Old Testament ceremony, but by receiving the word of the New Testament: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1Jn 1:9)

c. **The gates, and the wall:** Third, their surroundings were purified. Purified surrounding help us to walk in purity consistently. The homes and offices of many Christians could use a good purification and cleansing.

3. (31-43) *Two choirs lead Jerusalem in joyful praise.*

So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs. One went to the right hand on the wall toward the Refuse Gate. After them went Hoshai and half of the leaders of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, and some of the priests' sons with trumpets; Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, and his brethren, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. Ezra the scribe went before them. By the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went up the stairs of the City of

David, on the stairway of the wall, beyond the house of David, as far as the Water Gate eastward. The other thanksgiving choir went the opposite way, and I was behind them with half of the people on the wall, going past the Tower of the Ovens as far as the Broad Wall, and above the Gate of Ephraim, above the Old Gate, above the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped by the Gate of the Prison. So the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God, likewise I and the half of the rulers with me; and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Minjamin, Michaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah the director. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

a. **Appointed two large thanksgiving choirs:** The two large choirs were called **thanksgiving choirs** for good reason. All praise and worship must have a strong element of thanksgiving to God for it to be genuine.

i. Notice that **the singers sang loudly**. They had to be heard, because as glorious as the instruments were, the people would follow the lead of the singers in worship.

b. **God made them rejoice with great joy:** God did this with the choirs assembled, and the people spread all about. They were then overwhelmed with joy and thanksgiving, considering all God had done.

c. **The women and the children also rejoiced:** This tremendous experience of worship was for everyone.

There weren't some who weren't able to worship.

d. **The joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off:** Their worship was a testimony to others, and what others heard was not so much the singing itself as the *joy*. We often worry about others hearing us sing; but what God wants to hear and what others should hear is not so much your singing, but your *joy*.

3. (44-47) *Other aspects of this day of joy.*

And at the same time some were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse for the offerings, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions specified by the Law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who ministered. Both the singers and the gatekeepers kept the charge of their God and the charge of the purification, according to the command of David and Solomon his son. For in the days of David and Asaph of old *there were* chiefs of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the portions for the singers and the gatekeepers, a portion for each day. They also consecrated *holy things* for the Levites, and the Levites consecrated *them* for the children of Aaron.

a. **Some were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse for the offerings:** This was a day of *giving*. People brought their **offerings, firstfruits, tithes** to the storehouse of the Levites, and they did it with joy because they enjoyed supporting the priests and Levites ministering on their behalf.

b. **Both the singers and the gatekeepers kept the charge of their God and the charge of the purification:** This was a day of *purity*. It was an ongoing concern, not a one-time ceremony.

c. **They also consecrated holy things for the Levites:** It was a day of *consecration*. Holy things were set apart for the Levites, speaking of the separation unto God.

Nehemiah's Final Reforms

Neh 13:1 When the Law of Moses was being read aloud to the people, they came to the passage that said that no Ammonite or Moabite was ever to be permitted to join God's people.

Neh 13:2 This was because the people of Ammon and Moab did not give food and water to the Israelites on their way out of Egypt. Instead, they paid money to Balaam to curse Israel, but our God turned the curse into a blessing.

Neh 13:3 When the people of Israel heard this law read, they excluded all foreigners from the community.

Neh 13:4 The priest Eliashib, who was in charge of the Temple storerooms, had for a long time been on good terms with Tobiah.

Neh 13:5 He allowed Tobiah to use a large room that was intended only for storing offerings of grain and incense, the equipment used in the Temple, the offerings for the priests, and the tithes of grain, wine, and olive oil given to the Levites, to the Temple musicians, and to the Temple guards.

Neh 13:6 While this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, because in the thirty-second year that Artaxerxes was king of Babylon I had gone back to report to him. After some time I received his permission

Neh 13:7 and returned to Jerusalem. There I was shocked to find that Eliashib had allowed Tobiah to use a room in the Temple.

Neh 13:8 I was furious and threw out all of Tobiah's belongings.

Neh 13:9 I gave orders for the rooms to be ritually purified and for the Temple equipment, grain offerings, and incense to be put back.

Neh 13:10 I also learned that the Temple musicians and other Levites had left Jerusalem and gone back to their farms, because the people had not been giving them enough to live on.

Neh 13:11 I reprimanded the officials for letting the Temple be neglected. And I brought the Levites and musicians back to the Temple and put them to work again.

Neh 13:12 Then all the people of Israel again started bringing to the Temple storerooms their tithes of grain, wine, and olive oil.

Neh 13:13 I put the following men in charge of the storerooms: Shelemiah, a priest; Zadok, a scholar of the Law; and Pedaiah, a Levite. Hanan, the son of Zaccur and grandson of Mattaniah, was to be their assistant. I knew I could trust these men to be honest in distributing the supplies to the other workers.

Neh 13:14 Remember, my God, all these things that I have done for your Temple and its worship.

Neh 13:15 At that time I saw people in Judah pressing juice from grapes on the Sabbath. Others were loading grain, wine, grapes, figs, and other things on their donkeys and taking them into Jerusalem; I warned them not to sell anything on the Sabbath.

Neh 13:16 Some people from the city of Tyre were living in Jerusalem, and they brought fish and all kinds of goods into the city to sell to our people on the Sabbath.

Neh 13:17 I reprimanded the Jewish leaders and told them, "Look at the evil you're doing! You're making the Sabbath unholy.

Neh 13:18 This is exactly why God punished your ancestors when he brought destruction on this city. And yet you insist

on bringing more of God's anger down on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

Neh 13:19 So I gave orders for the city gates to be shut at the beginning of every Sabbath, as soon as evening began to fall, and not to be opened again until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my men at the gates to make sure that nothing was brought into the city on the Sabbath.

Neh 13:20 Once or twice merchants who sold all kinds of goods spent Friday night outside the city walls.

Neh 13:21 I warned them, "It's no use waiting out there for morning to come. If you try this again, I'll use force on you." From then on they did not come back on the Sabbath.

Neh 13:22 I ordered the Levites to purify themselves and to go and guard the gates to make sure that the Sabbath was kept holy. Remember me, O God, for this also, and spare me because of your great love.

Neh 13:23 At that time I also discovered that many of the Jewish men had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.

Neh 13:24 Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or some other language and didn't know how to speak our language.

Neh 13:25 I reprimanded the men, called down curses on them, beat them, and pulled out their hair. Then I made them take an oath in God's name that never again would they or their children intermarry with foreigners.

Neh 13:26 I told them, "It was foreign women that made King Solomon sin. Here was a man who was greater than any of the kings of other nations. God loved him and made him king over all of Israel, and yet he fell into this sin.

Neh 13:27 Are we then to follow your example and disobey our God by marrying foreign women?"

Neh 13:28 Joiada was the son of Eliashib the High Priest, but one of Joiada's sons married the daughter of Sanballat, from the town of Beth Horon, so I made Joiada leave Jerusalem.

Neh 13:29 Remember, God, how those people defiled both the office of priest and the covenant you made with the priests and the Levites.

Neh 13:30 I purified the people from everything foreign; I prepared regulations for the priests and the Levites so that all of them would know their duties;

Neh 13:31 I arranged for the wood used for burning the offerings to be brought at the proper times, and for the people to bring their offerings of the first grain and the first fruits that ripened. Remember all this, O God, and give me credit for it.

Nehemiah 13:1-31

Nehemiah 13 – Nehemiah's Reforms

A. True worship leads to the nation's obedience.

1. (1-2) Hearing the law brings a call to obedience.

On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing.

a. No Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God: As the people drew near to God in worship (as seen in Nehemiah 11, 12), they became aware of God's standards. In this case the standard stated in Deu 23:3-4, where the Ammonites and

Moabites were not to be regarded as part of Israel (unless they converted to the worship of Israel's God).

b. Should ever come into the assembly of God: This meant to be regarded as one of the people of Israel and people of God. It meant one could fully participate in the spiritual life of Israel.

i. An Israelite was part of God's covenant by birth; but an Ammonite or Moabite was not. They had to become a part of the covenant by choice – by joining with God's covenant people and leaving the gods of their people. They had to choose to reject those gods and embrace Yahweh.

ii. This command was a powerful message. It said to these Ammonites and Moabites, "You were not a part of the people of God by birth. You must choose this and leave the thinking and deeds of your anti-God culture, and truly join in the spiritual life of God's people. Unless you leave one and join the other, you will never really be a part of this spiritual life. Come join us!"

c. Because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water: The Ammonites and Moabites were singled out because of their devious schemes against Israel when Israel came into the promised land – at least a thousand years before this.

i. Long before, the Ammonites and Moabites had schemed against Israel, God had made a promise to the father of the Jewish people, Abraham: *I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you* (Gen 12:3). This command was simply another fulfillment of this promise.

d. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing: This refers to the events of Numbers 22-24,

where God blessed Israel, even though the prophet Balaam wanted to curse them. It also reminds us that God is able – more than able – to turn any curse into a blessing.

2. (3) *After hearing God's command, Israel obeys and separates from the mixed multitude.*

So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel.

a. **They separated all the mixed multitude from Israel:** They could have thought of 20 reasons to *not* do what the word of God plainly told them to do. Instead, they simply obeyed.

i. They might have made familiar excuses:

- "That command was made long ago and speaks to a different time."
- "Things are different now."
- "Let's not go overboard."
- "Let's assign a committee to examine the issue."

b. **The mixed multitude:** This refers to those who wanted to associate with the people of Israel but did not make a full commitment and embrace the covenant.

i. Even today, there may be people of good will in churches; honorable people, who have some respect for God and His word. Yet they are part of **the mixed multitude** because they have not received God's covenant of salvation in Jesus. Such people are welcome, but it should be understood where they stand.

B. Nehemiah's reforms.

1. (4-9) *Temple reforms.*

Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah. And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, the tithes of grain, the new wine and oil, which were commanded *to be given* to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priests. But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

a. **But during all this I was not in Jerusalem:** This section indicates that Nehemiah left Jerusalem and went back to his duties in the Persian court. He was gone from Jerusalem for anywhere from 10 to 12 years.

i. Nehemiah left sometime after the remarkable spiritual revival noted in the recent chapters. But the real test of revival – the real test of God’s work in our lives – is the long term. It is seeing where we are with the Lord ten years after a season of great work.

b. **I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah:** When Nehemiah came back, he saw that **Eliashib the priest** had entered into agreements with one of the enemies of Nehemiah’s work of rebuilding the wall – the man named **Tobiah**.

i. Incidentally, **Tobiah** was an Ammonite (Neh 2:10) – one of the very mixed multitude that had been put out of the assembly of God’s people some 10 years before. At this point in the record of Nehemiah, **Tobiah** was not only *present* among the assembly, he actually rented rooms in the temple courts (**preparing a room for him in the courts**).

ii. Apparently, Tobiah had not changed over the years. He did not join the people of God in the terms of His covenant. The problem was evident to Nehemiah – but **Eliashib** was completely blind to it.

c. **And it grieved me bitterly:** There were many reasons why this was so distressing to Nehemiah.

i. It **grieved** him because rooms in the courts of the temple of God were being occupied by a man not only a pagan, but who also had a history of actively opposing God’s work in the days of Nehemiah.

ii. It **grieved** him because it reflected so badly on Eliashib (a man who was a spiritual leader in Israel) and those around him. It showed that if Eliashib was blind to a problem area, there was also no one around him who could confront him with the problem.

iii. It **grieved** him because it made Nehemiah question the lasting value of the spiritual revival he witnessed when last in Jerusalem.

d. **Therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room:** Nehemiah wasn’t one to only sit back and grieve. He took action.

- He threw all of Tobiah’s **household goods** out of the rooms he occupied in the temple courts.
- He ceremonially cleansed the rooms.

- He put the rooms back to their proper use – as storerooms for the sacred things of the temple.

i. Nehemiah was much like Jesus, who later cleansed the temple from those who profaned it. Both Jesus and Nehemiah had the wisdom to not confuse love with being “nice” – and they both had the wisdom to know when to take bold action.

2. (10-14) Financial reforms.

I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given *them*; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. So I contended with the rulers, and said, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” And I gathered them together and set them in their place. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to their brethren. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!

a. **I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them:** The people did not obey God’s word regarding giving. Because of the lack of support, those who should give their time to the service of God and His people (**the Levites and the singers**) could not – and they had to leave that service (**had gone back to his field**).

b. **Why is the house of God forsaken:** The lack of giving was a way of forsaking the house of God. It wasn’t

just unhelpful to the **Levites and the singers**; it was a way of turning their back on God.

c. **I gathered them all together and set them in their place**: Nehemiah set the situation right by expecting the Levites and the singers to recommit to the work of serving God and His people as they should. He also reorganized the collection, accounting, and distribution of the people's tithes and gifts.

3. (15-22) Priority reform.

In those days I saw *people* in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all *kinds of* burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned *them* about the day on which they were selling provisions. Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold *them* on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing *is* this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath." So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted *some* of my servants at the gates, *so that* no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. Then I warned them, and said to them, "Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!" From that time on they came no

more on the Sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy!

a. **In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath:** The Sabbath was being ignored in disobedience to God's clear command under the Old Covenant. On the Sabbath day when they were supposed to rest and trust God, foreigners sold, and the people of Israel bought.

i. At the root, this was a problem of priorities. There was nothing wrong with buying and selling, only when the desire to buy and sell, to make money or spend money, became more important than honoring God. This was a clear way the people of Israel put making and spending money before glorifying God.

ii. The New Testament makes it clear we are not under the law of the Sabbath in the same sense Israel was under the Old Covenant (Col 2:16-17); but we are certainly under the same obligation to make honoring God more important than making money or spending money.

b. **You bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath:** Nehemiah knew that sin was not only a personal issue. When such open sin is winked at and left uncorrected among God's people, it invites the correcting hand of God.

i. Nehemiah wasn't going to sit still for this; he threatened **If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!** He did not mean the gentle laying on of hands for prayer, but the rough laying on of hands for correction.

4. (23-31a) *Relationship reform.*

In those days I also saw Jews *who* had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, *and* Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, *saying*, “You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?” And *one* of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, *was* a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service, and *to bringing* the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times.

- a. **In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab:** In the years Nehemiah was away the Israelites had resumed their practice of intermarrying with the pagan nations surrounding them. This was in dramatic disobedience to God’s command.

b. **So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear:** From this strong reaction of Nehemiah, we gather he considered this to be the most dangerous of their sins – pursuing ungodly romance, and getting involved in romantic relationships God had said “no” to.

i. His example of Solomon is well taken (**Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things... pagan women caused even him to sin**). If Solomon, one of the wisest and most blessed men ever, sinned with unwise and ungodly romance then no one else should consider themselves invulnerable.

5. (31b) Conclusion: Nehemiah's clear conscience.

Remember me, O my God, for good!

a. **Remember me:** At the end of it all, Nehemiah knew he did his best to make the people of God strong, safe, and secure. Beyond that, he also led them to be pure, worshipful, and obedient.

b. **Remember me, O my God, for good:** Yet, Nehemiah certainly carried a sense of failure. In Nehemiah 10 the people made a solemn covenant to God that they would not do three things.

- Have ungodly romantic relationships (Neh 10:30).
- Buy and sell on the Sabbath (Neh 10:31).
- Fail to support the work of God with money as He commanded (Neh 10:32-39).

i. Nevertheless, in Nehemiah 13, some 10 to 12 years later, Israel was again steeped in the exact sins they vowed to stop. Nehemiah had to address the problems of ungodly romantic relationships (Neh 13:23-31), buying and selling on the Sabbath

(Neh 13:15-22), and failing to support the work of God as He commanded (Neh 13:10-14).

ii. In Neh 10:39 the people promised: *we will not neglect the house of our God*. But later in Neh 13:11, Nehemiah had to ask: *Why is the house of God forsaken?* It was forsaken because Israel did not keep its promises before God.

iii. This makes a point vividly clear: the law – that is, rules, vows, promises, covenants, and the such, are all ultimately powerless to stop sin. Only the grace of God, alive and flowing in our lives, can give us the power to truly overcome sin.

iv. Paul expressed this in Rom 8:3, among other places: *For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh*. Too many Christians look for victory in the making of rules, of vows, of promises – and fail to find it, because all those things tend to make us look to ourselves, instead of looking to Jesus.

v. The Old Testament history of Israel, from beginning to end, illustrates this. When the nation was first born at the Exodus, despite the most spectacular miracles, displays of God's glory, and revelation of the law, the people sinned, by crediting a gold calf with their deliverance from Egypt! And now here, at the end of the Old Testament history of God's people in the promised land, Nehemiah is pulling hair out – his own and those of sinners – because they couldn't keep their promises to God.

vi. If we could be saved by our own promises, by our own commitment to Jesus, then His death would have been noble, but unnecessary. We aren't saved by some vow we make, or some leaf we turn over, but by

trusting in who Jesus is, and what He has done to save us.